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bike
MAGAZINE

VOL 22 | NO 05



ON THE COVER

Richie Schley and Darren Berrecloth soak up the last of a late spring ride on 10,064-foot Mount Baldy, the highest peak in the San Gabriel Mountains outside of Los Angeles. Image by Italy-based photographer Ale Di Lullo.

features

076 **ESCAPE IN L.A.**

Endless traffic, sprawl and celebrity hype can cloud the positives of living in Los Angeles, like miles of amazing trail located just outside the concrete jungle.

086 **SKID ROW**

Think klunker culture faded with the '70s? Not so fast. Meet three unlikely devotees to riding coaster-brake-equipped cruisers down L.A.'s gnarliest trails.

092 **PAIN CAVE**

Nine hours. Sixty-five miles. Ninety-five degree heat. The All-Day Debacle in San Diego's North County had several of its participants begging for mercy.

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ADRIAN MARCOUX

VOL 22 | NO 05

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MEGAN FORREST

RYAN CLEEK

Ryan Cleek is as a writer, photographer and filmmaker with a lingering fascination with professional wrestler 'The Nature Boy' Ric Flair. Raised in a household with a strict diet of Bible force-feeding, like foie gras prepped for an Easter feast, and "60 Minutes," Ryan and his imaginary friends enjoyed years of wacky adventures together. After Sunday church he would sneak into the attic and have his own devotional with the WWF on an old television.

A graduate of Butler University's School of Journalism, he spent a decade as a staff writer and photographer for *Mountain Bike Action*, before working in global marketing at Specialized Bicycles until late 2014. Currently, Ryan is in post-production on a feature-length film about freeride mountain biker Cam Zink.

A Sagittarius with a fondness for celebrity gossip websites and Alan Watts lectures, Ryan's other hobbies include maintaining the dozen screws and staples and cadaver Achilles tendons inside each of his handcrafted knees and seeing how long he can survive on sushi, orange-flavored Tic Tacs and vodka. Ryan wrote "Escape in L.A." on page 76 and "Skid Row" on page 86. Woooo!

@CLEEKNDSTROY



NIC GENOVESE

ADRIAN MARCOUX

Adrian Marcoux describes himself as a simple man who digs making photographs and spending time around his cabin in the woods in Squamish, British Columbia.

Marcoux travels the globe shooting, but didn't have to stray too far for the assignment to ride with Los Angelinos for the "Escape in L.A." story starting on page 76 and "Skid Row," a look at one group of buddies' diehard commitment to klunking, on page 86. Before the trip Adrian failed to recognize that the mountains surrounding L.A. are monsters, and within minutes from Sunset Boulevard one can be smack in the middle of them with a few thousand feet of mind-blowing trail at your 12 o'clock. He also learned of the incredible riding in the shadow of the Hollywood sign, once you science out when the veins of the metropolis allow you the right of passage to indulge. Marcoux and writer Ryan Cleek met a melting pot of characters in L.A., all with very different go-to rides. Even though their lives were often dictated by traffic patterns and proximity to the trails, this didn't stop them from riding. Marcoux tips his hat to the L.A. locals who put the extra effort into earning their turns.

@AMARCOUXPHOTOS



PARIS GORE

ALE DI LULLO

Growing up in Lake Garda, Italy, Ale Di Lullo was always a creative person who gravitated toward all forms of art. During university, he studied digital media and began expressing his creativity through photography.

Living in an extreme sports capital in Europe exposed Di Lullo to windsurfing, rock climbing and mountain biking in the '90s. At that time, though, he was more into board culture. But in 1996, a trip to California led to a mountain bike ride with a buddy that changed his outlook, and he has been involved in the sport ever since.

He returns to California every year to shoot in "the best light in the world and some of the best natural landscape on earth." These trips almost always take him to Laguna Beach to shoot with his longtime friends locals Richie Schley, Brian Lopes and Hans Rey. Laguna Beach is one of Di Lullo's favorite spots to shoot, and his passion is reflected in the images he took for "Sea of Change" on page 44. Di Lullo also landed his first cover for *Bike* this month with his golden-hour image of Schley and Darren Berre-cloth riding Mount Baldy.

ALEDILULLO.COM

FEATURED THIS MONTH ON

bikemag.com

JUNGLE BOOGIE How does slogging through the mountainous jungles of New Zealand's North Island sound to you? In March, Diamondback rider Mike Hopkins and the *Bike* crew trekked through the Kaimanawa Forest, where we battled slick hike-a-bikes on oily roots and eventually found a few nuggets of untouched singletrack to justify all the suffering. Find the full story, with images and video, on bikemag.com.

NEW BLUEPRINT EPISODES If the Trek Stache 9 29+ test in this issue has you wondering why the industry has introduced more new standards, go online for our in-depth "Blueprint" video on 27.5+ and 29+. While you're there, be sure to watch our "Blueprint" on the development of Evil's The Following, the 29er that's making Evil Bikes owner Kevin Walsh eat his hat.



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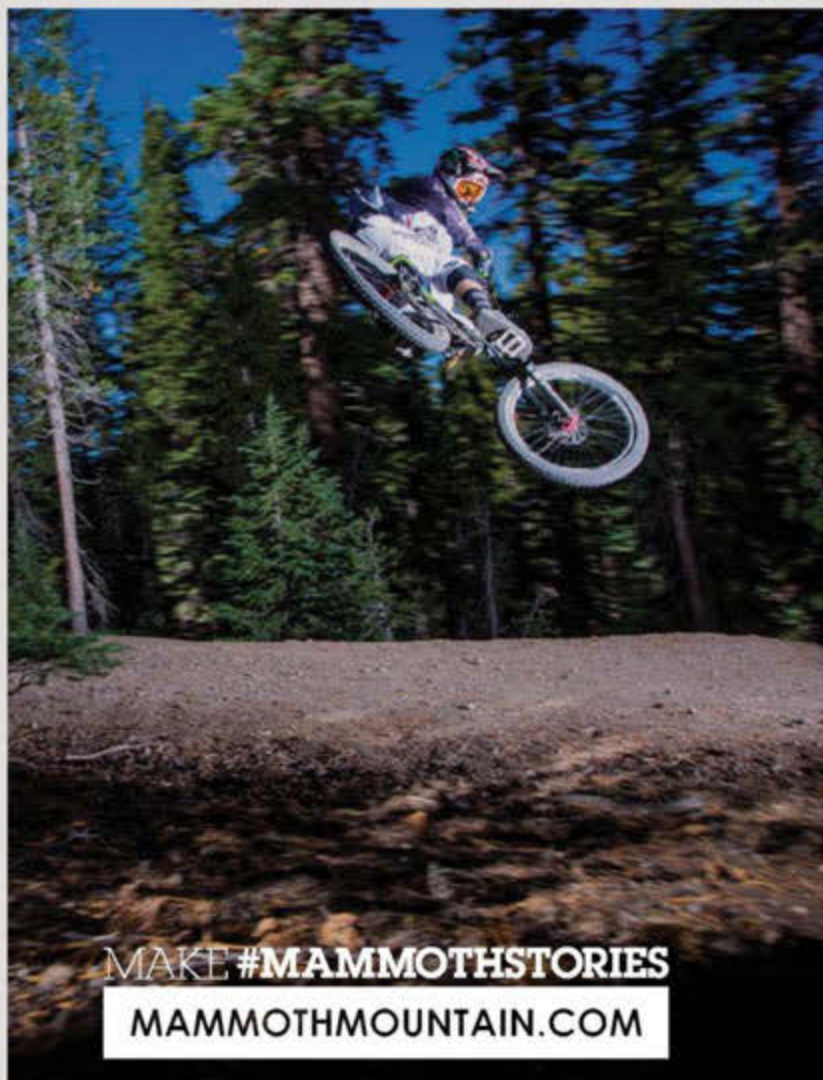
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by brice minnigh | photo: ale di lullo

sunny and 68

WHY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DOESN'T SUCK AFTER ALL

PEOPLE LOVE TO HATE CALIFORNIA—ESPECIALLY SOUTHERN California. And much of this hate is active. Tell a fellow North American that you live in Southern California and they'll typically rattle off a long list of criticisms and grievances: It's too crowded; the traffic is horrible; there's a chronic shortage of water; the people are superficial or downright fake; everyone over age 40 has had plastic surgery; surfing is too hard and local surfers are rude in the water; the trails are dry, dusty and blown-out, and you have to drive to get to them.

Even members of *Bike's* editorial staff have been known to make similar complaints from time to time, and there's good reason for many of these gripes. But they're not the whole story, and such negativity can obscure the many incredible things about So-Cal life. First of all, the weather is absolutely amazing. For much of the year, it's sunny and mild, with the ultra-pleasant coastal areas getting a steady dose of soul-affirming sea breezes. With such awesome weather, SoCal residents naturally spend a lot of time outdoors, and few of us would ever take issue with that.

Of course for us mountain bikers, this means we can ride *year round*. The only days we *can't* ride are during and after the odd rainstorm, and that's only because of the damage that riding in the wet does to our trails. During the winter months, while much of North America is buried under snow and ice, we're out for all-day shreds in short sleeves and sunglasses. At the end of every ride, a piping-hot burrito is never far from the trailhead. And we can wash it down with a refreshing Mexican lager or a tasty craft beer from one of the dozens of world-class SoCal breweries.

When you look at it this way, life in Southern California is pretty damn good—which is why we've devoted much of this issue to the southern half of The Golden State. We're celebrating our own backyard diversity, from the sun-drenched sufferfest of San Diego's 'All-Day Debacle' (page 92) to the curious riding subcultures that the Los Angeles scene has spawned (page 76), including a clique of klunker fanatics (page 86). Just don't let any of this convince you to come here—we have way too many people as it is. 🍷



ABOVE AVERAGE

The 2015 *Bible of Bike Tests* is amazing! I wish I had enough money to buy the new Evil The Following 29 or the Rocky Mountain Thunderbolt. But nope, I don't. I would like to see more average bikes in your next *Bible of Bike Tests*. I'm riding with a lot of friends who have bikes that cost between \$2,000 and \$3,000. When we need a new bike, we're looking for something in this range. I'm sure that most of your readers don't have \$5,000 to put toward a new bike. Winter is too long here in Québec, Canada. Can't wait to ride my Oryx Spitfire 66... ouch! I need a new bike!

MAX BERGERON; QUÉBEC, CANADA

BIBLE COMMITMENT

Your *Bible of Bike Tests* is probably my favorite issue of the year—of any magazine. I can only imagine the preparation it takes to put together such an enormous undertaking. Thinking about the logistics of such a project gives me a headache, and all I do is anticipate it. And that's not even mentioning the YouTube 'Roundtable Reels' series you've been putting together to accompany the *Bible*. Thank

you for all your hard work!

I know that you and your readers have been asking about guest riders for the *Bible*, and I would love to be able to get in on that discussion. You guys have mentioned the time and commitment it takes to be a part of the *Bible*. Well, I'm a firefighter who has a deep passion for mountain biking. That being said, with enough notice I could easily commit to an extended amount of time for you all to use at will. I'm used to long hours with low pay, so that shouldn't be an issue at all. Keep up the good work and keep the great photos coming!

MATT CIANCIA; ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Matt, thank you very much for your kind words about our Bible of Bike Tests. We'd love to have you join us as a tester, but our test crew has already been finalized for next year's Bible project. —Ed.

In late April we launched a new "Blueprint" video and feature that investigated the pros and cons of plus-size wheels and tires, eliciting hundreds of comments on bikemag.com and the Bike Facebook page. Following is what a few people had to say about the issue:

CUT THE SH*T

This just highlights why I love *Bike* mag. I love the "let's cut the shit" attitude. I personally love that there are tons of options out there and you can really fine-tune your ride to be something life changing to you. Oh, and yes, bike companies want to sell bikes. They aren't there to sell you a horse-drawn wagon forever and ever. That said, I am going to run my Trek

Fuel 26er into the ground and my next bike will be loaded with new tech and will no doubt be the best thing I've ever thrown a leg over...aside from my '91 Rocky Mountain Blizzard, which I adore.

DANIEL; ON BIKEMAG.COM

CONSUMER LOSS

This is just absurd. With 135 to 142, fine, we got through-axles. But this is just horseshit through and through. I don't mean the plus-size wheel. I see that as filling out the quiver. Maybe a fatbike or cross bike isn't your thing for a second or third bike. I get that, but shoving the 148-mil rear and 110-mil front at consumers when it is a marginal upgrade is total bullshit.

I usually get a new XC frame each year, knowing that my old parts will fit and I could sell the old frame to offset the new purchase. But now that my wheels won't fit, why would I? Congrats, industry, on trying to increase your sales and selling it to us like we are buying a phone—the exact thing I am trying to escape when I ride. The phone is what, \$100? The new bike that debuted at Sea Otter you could finally order

in August, was promised in September and received in December because of "factory issues." Oops, now there's snow on the ground and you can't ride it until February or March, and it's old news in April of 2016. Maybe SRAM should stop rushing things to market only to warranty them instead of coming up with marginal improvements so Trek could sell a few more bikes. The consumer is not winning.

CHSAD; ON BIKEMAG.COM

WALLET VOTING

I think we're looking at this wrong. Take the motocross industry, for example: Every year or two they redesign part of their product. This redesign is innovation that makes better and better dirt bikes. I've never heard of a "standard" anything when referring to a redesign, yet in the bicycle industry we complain that there's a new "standard." Screw standards! Bring on the innovation. I don't and you don't have to buy a new bike every year. But you could if you wanted. It's about choice. When I buy my next bike I want the latest and greatest tech. Vote with your wallet.

MARK KLIGERMAN; ON FACEBOOK

letter of the month

I appreciated Kristin Butcher's "Tool Bags" article. There is no shortage of douchebaggery on the trail, and admittedly at some point in our lives we've all likely been guilty of it ourselves. That said, I'd like to add one more example to the list: the 'They-Sayer'. They are the people who make comments such as, "They should fix this trail" or "they should berm out that turn better" or "they need to get a chainsaw out here to remove that fallen tree." News flash: *They are you!*

Lots of time and effort goes into building and maintaining trails. If you haven't done so already, please join your local mountain bike club and join some volunteer trail days. You'll be glad you did. You'll have a stronger appreciation for the trails you ride and you'll be one step closer to being less douchey. And to all those who have already joined trail days, please know that you are appreciated.

NOLAN LANGWEIL; MONTPELIER, VERMONT

Hi Nolan, thanks for sharing your thoughts on the importance of everyone playing a part in building and maintaining our trails. We're sending you this Syncros multi-tool for when you're enjoying the fruits of your labor. —Ed.



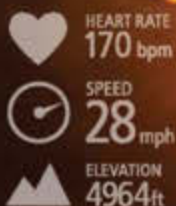
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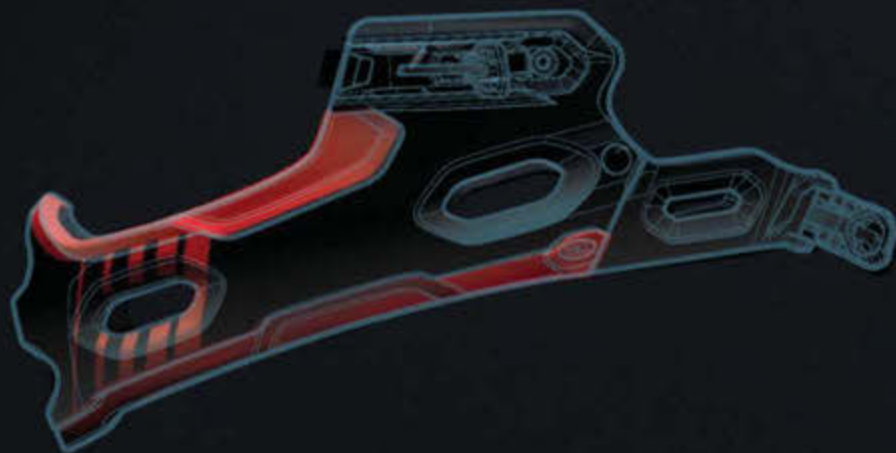
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OVERLAND

Rider: Wade Simmons & Geoff Gulevich
Photo: Margus Riga
Location: Agua Fria River, AZ



Love the ride.







elle cochrane. zermatt, switzerland | photo: mattias fredriksson







steve storey. martin, slovakia | photo: justa jeskova



brendan fairclough. hafjell, norway | photo: duncan philpott

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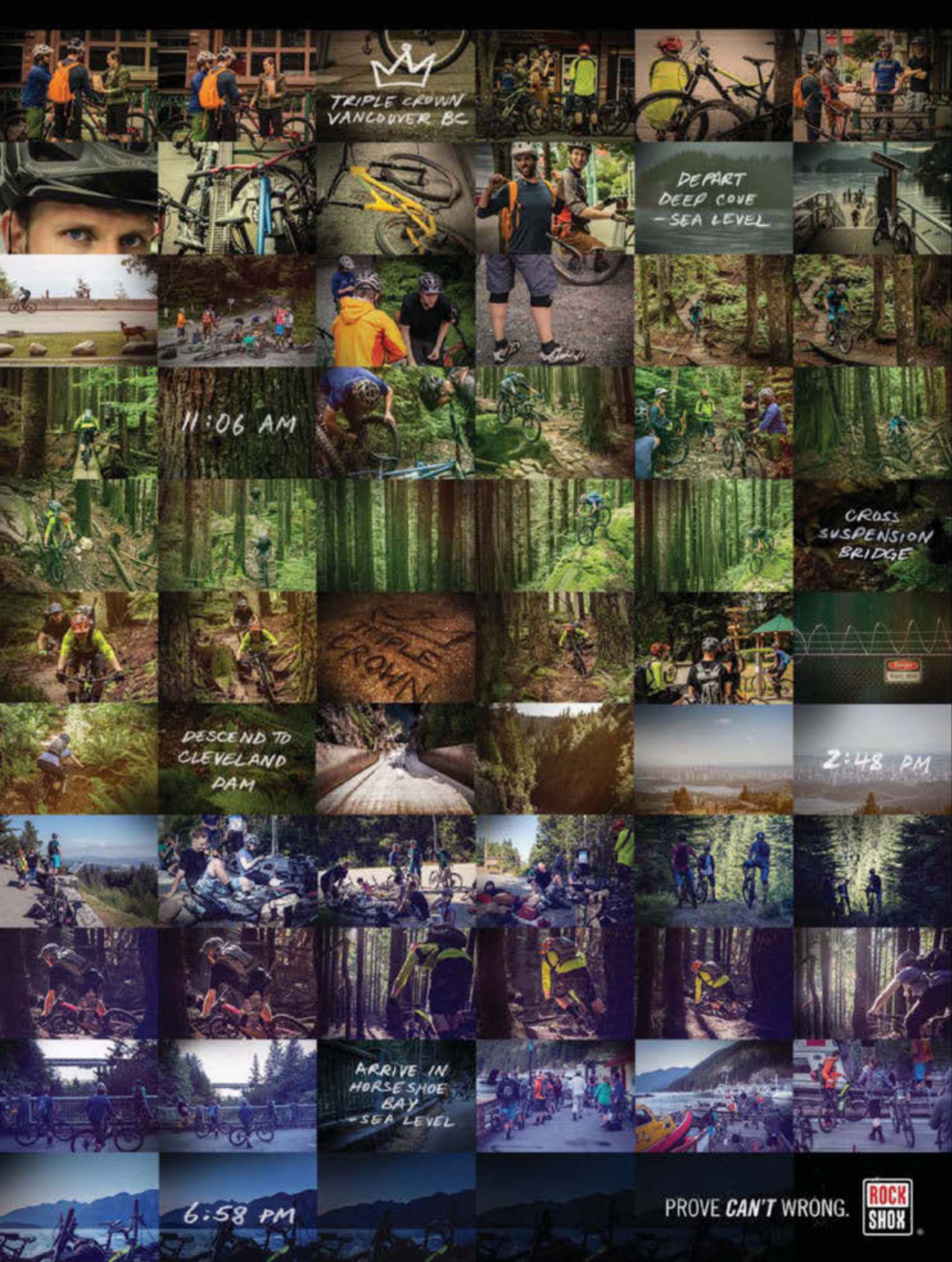


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sea of change

THE PRIMITIVE TRAIL NETWORK IN LAGUNA BEACH, CALIFORNIA, IS IN THE MIDST OF TRANSITION

THE STORY OF MOUNTAIN BIKING IN LAGUNA BEACH, CALIFORNIA, differs drastically depending on who is telling it. On one hand, there's the Laguna Beach glorified by the legendary RADS mountain bike club, and recognized by riders globally. That story often includes accounts of riding the web of unmarked singletrack expertly etched by the RADS over 30 years into the former ranchland-turned-open space that hulks above town. Or of shuttling DH runs on fall-line descents like Telonics, a trail made famous by the RADS and Laguna Beach transplant Hans Rey and immortalized in countless images (it once served as a namesake for a Kenda DH tire and is the venue for the famous Leaping Lizards race).

Then, there's the Laguna Beach that land managers *want* people to know about, which consists of a small selection of authorized singletrack spread over 15,000 acres of state and county parks surrounding town. The challenge now is convincing tourists—and locals—to choose that story line when they ride Laguna Beach, especially since arguably some of the best trails in the area are technically illegal. Thanks to Strava, what was once an underground scene is now obvious to anyone with a smartphone. As a result, the once-hidden unsanctioned trails are widening as more people

ride them, endangering the region's fragile coastal sage scrub. Environmentalists blame mountain bikers, mountain bikers balk and land managers are left to sort it all out.

"We don't have a purpose-built trail system, bottom line," said Hallie Jones, executive director of the nonprofit Laguna Canyon Foundation, which works with the land manager OC Parks to facilitate preservation. "We have these primitive trails and right now we're at this crisis point where the trails are being loved to death and by extension the land itself is being loved to death. And how do you keep that from happening without losing that primitive, wilderness feel?" Part of the answer, Jones contends, is to create trails that still feel primitive and fun, but also hold up to use by mountain bikers with varying levels of skill.

The Foundation has taken the first step in achieving that by hiring Mike Hall, a longtime RAD and local trail builder as its trails consultant. Hall spent the better part of 2015 rehabbing a popular RADs-built trail called Lizard so that OC Parks could legally open it to mountain bikers. The mile-long singletrack sits near the border of Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and Crystal Cove State Park. It starts out in typical Laguna Beach fashion, loose



Photography: Harokiz



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and rocky, with a couple small drops that flow into a few pedal sections and one hike-a-bike up a steep, ledgy rock face, before transitioning into a perfectly paced, tree-shrouded singletrack that winds around corners with enough speed to require a couple brake checks. Hall has armored the top of Lizard to control the grade and buttress the trail so riders don't skirt the main line and damage nearby habitat. His work should also improve run-off to avoid the ruts that plague most Laguna trails.

Similar work is planned for the fall-line Laguna Ridge, better known as T & A, which drops 700 feet in seven-tenths of a mile, starting with a high-consequence rock garden. If you go down there, on a good day, your only post-crash wound care will be plucking painful cholla cactus needles out of your skin. Also on Hall's to-do list is 5 Oaks on the south side of Laguna Canyon, which will require rock armoring, grade reversals and a possible reroute to mellow several unsustainable grades. While some may call this 'dumbing down' the trails, it's all about balancing sustainability with use to maintain access.

Even without riding illegal trails, you can still piece together a rad all-day, leg-searing ride or a short post-work loop, with views of the ocean almost the whole way. If you're starting in downtown, there's only one way to go: straight up. The former hippie colony turned upscale, beachside arts community is nestled at the end of a canyon between two large swaths of open space on the hills above town. On the north side sits Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, a 7,000-acre open space with 42 acres of legal trails and fire roads, only about 5 of which are singletrack, and the adjoining 2,400-acre Crystal Cove State Park, which has several more miles of singletrack. Between the two, you can rack up a few thousand feet of climbing in several hours by linking the short but raucous Old Emerald, BVD, Rattlesnake and T & A descents with various ridgeline fire roads. The trails are marked by typical SoCal characteristics—exposed, dry, loose and rocky; tree-cover is rarely part of the experience.

On the south side of the canyon, the trails of Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park are better known to mountain bikers, although, again, the majority are fire roads that link slivers of singletrack. Accessing the park from Laguna

Beach requires a slog up the brutal Canyon Acres doubletrack, which gains 1,000 quad-burning feet in 1.5 miles, or the more humane option—hop on the city bus and shuttle to Top of the World for less than a buck. You can also climb city streets to Top of the World if you want to stare at pavement for 30 minutes while your heart rate redlines. From there, choose one of several classic descents. There's Car Wreck—named aptly for the rusted 1947 Volvo on its side in the ravine at the bottom of the trail's upper rock garden—the steepest and most-technical (legal) line in the park, which starts out innocently then culminates in a steep, chunky mess of rocks with no visible line. Continue farther on the ridgeline to reach the less-technical, ripping-fast trails of Rockit and Lynx.

At the bottom, traverse the length of the park on tame single-track, while mentally preparing for the short punishing Cholla climb back up to the ridgeline. Cholla tests legs and lungs by rising 260 feet in just a third of a mile. Back up top, find Stair Steps, a trail whose name pretty much says it all, and plummet nearly 400 feet in less than a half-mile back onto Laguna Canyon Road for an easy cruise into town.

Though lacking in miles of singletrack, Laguna Beach's existing trail system is diverse in difficulty level, accessible directly from town and is located in one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. But Hall and Jones know that to keep mountain bikers from building and riding illegal trails for good, new options will eventually need to be considered. For now, they're working on a holistic plan for all the legal trails that they will use to recommend future rehab projects to OC Parks. "We've got to start with what we've got," Hall says. "If we can show them that we're responsible enough to stick with what we have and not throw it in their face that we're going to do whatever we want," trust will slowly start to build, which could potentially lead to new construction in the future.

Despite the current state of transition, one thing about riding Laguna Beach will never change—it's the only place in the world where you can be swimming in the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean before your disc brakes have cooled from the final screaming descent off the ridgeline. 🏍️

RIDE LAGUNA BEACH

STAY | Camping: Crystal Cove State Park. Primitive spaces in the park require a 3-mile ride in. Drop your gear at the site, then spend the day shredding singletrack. Or nab a spot in the popular beachside campground, directly across Pacific Coast Highway from the water. [Crystalcovestatepark.org](http://crystalcovestatepark.org). Hotels in town can be spendy, but there are dozens of short-term rentals on Airbnb.

EAT | For the best breakfast or post-ride burritos, go to La Sirena Grill. If it's quick, head to the downtown location. After a ride, hit up the South Laguna location for the widest craft brew selection in town. [Lasirenagrill.com](http://lasirenagrill.com). Stop by Café Zink for coffee, pastries and awesome vegetarian food. [Zincacafe.com](http://zincacafe.com).

GO | Town public bus (no service Sunday): Blue Route goes to Arch Beach Heights. The Gray Route services Top of the World. \$.75 each way. Lagunabeachcity.net. Laguna Cyclery: gear, rentals and trail info. Lagunabeachcyclery.com

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**FOR RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE BASSIST
TIM COMMERFORD, MOUNTAIN BIKING IS THE
ULTIMATE ANTIDOTE TO SELF-IMPLOSION**

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AROUND TIM COMMERFORD very long to understand how obsessed he is with mountain biking. The mere mention of bikes or trails will set the Rage Against the Machine bassist off on an animated rant about the virtues of riding mountain bikes as a way of life.

For the 47-year-old rock luminary, riding is a passion that runs as deep as his drive to create hard-hitting music. And over the past two decades, he's easily spent as much time in the saddle as he has behind the bass.

This fact became plenty clear during a late-April ride with Commerford in the hills behind his home in Malibu, California. From the moment we hit the fire road leading up to our Santa Monica Mountains route, it was obvious that the lanky musician was used to riding fast and free. Barely two months off a lower-back surgery, he was charging up a sustained climb and chatting away with the familiar ease of a talk-show host.

"I love how I get to forget everything that's happening in my world and reset my brain and just focus on what I'm doing on my bike," he told me as I struggled to keep up. "I can't tell you how many times I've finished a long ride and then didn't even remember what I rode.

"Quite often I'll go for a ride and end up on some trail that I'm not even used to, and then at some point I'll go, 'Where am I?' I'll just completely zone out and forget where I'm at."



by brice minnigh | photos: anthony smith

Commerford first learned about this instant reset in 1993, when his future father-in-law, bodybuilder James 'Jimbo' Insko, introduced him to mountain biking. He soon bought a chromoly Trek 930 hardtail and started exploring the Santa Monicas as a diversion from his bass-playing duties with Rage Against the Machine, a seminal rap-metal band with heavy political overtones.

"By 1995, I had my bike with me anytime I went on tour," Commerford says. "I've ridden a lot of different places in the world. As soon as we'd arrive to a new city I'd build up my bike and start exploring. It was such a great way to see a new place.

"Going on tour was two sides of an amazing coin. I got to be part of an incredible musical experience and then travel the world in the best way that you can. And that's on a bike."

Inspired by some of the sport's early heroes—such as John Tomac, Hans Rey, Shaun Palmer, Brian Lopes, Myles Rockwell and Steve Peat—Commerford delved deep into mountain biking, developing an appetite for virtually every discipline, from cross-country to downhill to dirt jumping.

"You name it, I'm into it," he says. "These days I'm more into big cross-country rides, though. I love to go out and just ride for hours and just lose myself. And I love climbing, especially technical climbs. I just love that challenge and the feeling of cleaning something that looks impossible to climb."

If my ride with Commerford was any indication, those words are an understatement. In just a few hours, we rode over 20 miles, with more than 4,000 feet of climbing. And



Rage Against the Machine bassist Tim Commerford loves to climb—a sentiment that harks back to the sport's roots. In 2014, he logged more than 1 million feet of climbing and finished the Leadville Trail 100 MTB Race in Leadville, Colorado, in 9 hours and 22 minutes. During his 22 years of riding, Commerford has amassed a formidable collection of scars (lower left) and broken bones.





Commerford and his 21-year-old neighbor, Marshall Mullen, spend countless hours racing each other along the trails of the Santa Monica Mountains.

he never let up. The steeper the trail got, the harder he charged, attacking ridiculously steep sections with an impressive combination of power and finesse. Once at the top, he'd turn around and ride back down so he could try an even tougher line.

"Tim's whole life is a game of engagement," says his neighbor, 21-year-old Marshall Mullen, who began riding at age 12 after seeing Commerford whisk by his house every day en route to the Santa Monica Mountains. "He's so intense and competitive with everything he does, and he puts everything he has into it, whether it's riding, or working on the pumptrack, or working on music. He's 110-percent engaged in everything he does, and I think that's partially why he's so successful. He's either in or out. There's no middle ground for him."

To be sure, Commerford's intensity is palpable from the moment you meet him. The wiry 6-foot, 4-inch-tall bassist is covered in lean muscle, suggesting a man half his age. He speaks with a tone of measured assuredness, his steely gaze hinting at a rare earnestness of character. Whether talking or riding with him, it's clear that he has zero tolerance for bullshit. And listening to him grunt and growl while climbing up a ledgy stretch of slickrock, it's easy to see how he's been such a force on the bass, from his Rage Against the Machine days through the Audioslave years and on to his current band, Future User.

"With Rage, it really was 'politics and rock 'n' roll,'" Commerford says. "When we'd go on tour, our main goal was to go onstage, play the best set we possibly could and just destroy everyone on the bill. It didn't matter who we were touring with. We always just

wanted to blow them off the stage. And we usually did. In all those years, I can only think of a couple of times when that might not have happened."

Riding with Commerford might be as intense as touring with him and his band. Every climb is a race to the top, and every technical section is a bike-handling contest. He and his riding buddies routinely play a game of 'dabs,' tallying up the number of times each rider puts a foot down, with the lowest score taking the win. Even on my ride with him, it seemed that the dab game was afoot, with Commerford good-naturedly heckling the much-younger Mullen whenever he'd lose momentum up a techy ascent.

"I remember one time I was trail riding with Lance (Armstrong) and he easily beat me to the top of a climb, but I saw that he'd dabbed a few times on the way up," Commerford recalls. "When I caught up to him he started to rub it in, but I just told him that the way I figured it, I'd won because I'd cleaned the whole climb without putting my foot down. That's what mountain biking is all about."

Though Commerford now rides a pimped-out Trek Remedy 9.8 that he describes as "the sickest bike in the world," for years his go-to bikes were downhill and freeride sleds, which he would muscle to the tops of the Malibu-area hills before bombing down the other sides.

"I used to use a dog collar to cinch the fork down between the crowns for the climbs," he explains. "Then before I'd go down I'd take the collar off and let the fork open up for the descents. It was a good system, and powering those heavy bikes up the hills made me a lot stronger."

One look through Commerford's garage is like a lesson in moun-

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tain-bike history, with an enviable assortment of vintage hardtails and several generations of groundbreaking gravity-oriented rigs. He practically has the entire evolution of Santa Cruz Bicycles' full-suspension line hanging from the rafters, from the first-generation, single-pivot Superlight to a well-worn Heckler and a decommissioned Bullit. Concealed among a pile of old wheelsets is a stripped-down Intense M1 downhill bike, while in a corner lies a beat-up old Intense Uzzi VPX.

"When I get that bike dialed, it runs as good as any bike out there today," Commerford claims. "I know it has 26-inch wheels and everyone thinks those are outdated, but sometimes I wonder if 26 isn't better for that kind of riding."

Underneath his workbench are several drawers filled to the brim with old components, including one crammed full of discarded front and rear derailleurs.

"I'm pretty sure every derailleur I've ever owned is in here," he says with a smile. "I think I've got every version of (Shimano) XTR that's ever been made. I've always loved XTR. To me, having a set of XTR cranks is like having a Rolex. And Shimano XTR brakes...are you kidding me? There are no other brakes like that. They work so good, and when you wear the brake pads down and replace them, the moment you slide the wheel back in the brakes are perfectly



centered on the rotor. I love it when things just work like that."

If Commerford's garage is a snapshot of mountain-bike history, then his battered body is a testament to a lifetime of crashes, injuries and surgeries. His knees and shins are covered in scars, with the unmistakable tattoo on his left leg pockmarked in discolored scar tissue. His list of surgeries is long, from the human cadaver graft in the AC joint of his left shoulder to the screws in his left

Pilot: Andreu "LaConti-Guy" Lacondeguy

Drift...



Handmade in Germany.

Commerford's garage is like a mini museum of modern mountain-bike history, with an impressive array of first-generation DH and freeride bikes hanging from the rafters.



pinkie finger and the two metal plates in his skull.

"I had to get those after a really bad crash I had on the way to a Rage rehearsal," he states matter-of-factly. "Back then I thought you always needed a lot of speed to hit jumps, and I went way too fast into a big jump and overshot it. All I remember was that feeling of being scared, and the next thing I knew I was waking up in an emergency room.

"They had to put two metal plates in my skull. One is under my left eyebrow, and the other is in my left cheek, connecting my upper jaw to my orbital bone and eye socket."

Though injuries have taken a toll on Commerford, he insists that he is better off for them.

"If there's damage there, I'd like to think that the constant blood flow that comes from riding is ultimately going to keep me alive longer," he says. "Even though mountain biking is what has injured me, it's also what's made me feel the best I've ever felt in my life. The injuries I've had are all better because I ride."

Given Commerford's celebrity status and the often-fickle nature of relationships in the entertainment business, mountain biking also represents a retreat to a community of like-minded individuals.

"When you meet someone who is such a solid rider, you know that the bike has taken up such a large portion of that person's life, and that immediately means that you have something fundamental in common with them," he explains. "All of my friends are pretty much people I ride with. I meet people through riding, and most of the relationships I have with people are on the bike."

"It feels good to grow old and have a sport that I can do forever," he adds. "It's a religion, man—not just some hobby. It consumes me. I spend a lot of time thinking about it and I go to bed every night dreaming about it." 📺

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Continental GET THE GRIP



by leigh donovan | photo: david reddick

the right track

IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, SOMEWHERE ON THE ROAD BETWEEN CHILDHOOD AND ADULTHOOD, THERE IS A place that serves as a home for children to become independent and for adults to play like children. Every once in a while one of these children or adults emerges from this place a legend, breeding new opportunity for the next generation.

The BMX racing community knows it as the Orange Y BMX Track and it sits just off the 55 Freeway, amid the Eucalyptus trees in Orange, California. From afar, its lights pique the interest of passersby and for many, once they enter the gates, they find their halls of ivy, as I did as an 11-year-old. On triweekly race nights, the announcer's command, "Riders set it up" echoes once a minute throughout the track, then the gate clangs open, letting loose eight adrenaline-filled riders to sprint down the first straightway. Elbow-to-elbow, racers pedal feverishly over the jumps and battle through the corners, trying to be first to the finish line. In the background, there is a common melody of family, friends and racing.

In 1990, local BMX hotshot Dave Cullinan transitioned to the big leagues, sharing his BMX artistry with the world of downhill mountain bike racing. He rose to the top of the gravity ranks in 1992 when he was crowned downhill world champion. Many of us Orange locals, like Eric Carter, Toby Henderson, Tara Llanes, Brian Lopes, Mike King, Pete Locarevich and myself followed his lead and some became legends as well, but not before finding our skills, our love of the bike and our home at the Orange Y. 🏍️

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by brice minnigh | photo: anthony smith

notes from the top

AN AMMUNITION BOX FILLED WITH INSPIRATION

NEATLY STASHED IN A CRACK BETWEEN the rocks that mark the summit of Southern California's Los Pinos Peak is an unassuming ammunition box containing notebooks filled with the thoughts of people who have made their way to the top of this mountain. Though the peak's elevation is only 4,510 feet above sea level, its relative barrenness and proximity to the Pacific Ocean make it feel deceptively high, and on clear days it offers staggering vistas of neighboring mountains and Catalina and San Clemente islands. These views, coupled with the arduous singletrack climb to the peak, can prompt visitors to record a wide range of emotions in the notebooks that lie protected in the ammo canister (which was originally placed in this spot by a soulful group of local mountain bikers known as 'BGR'). Following is a selection of some of the most engaging entries from the past year.

APRIL 6, 2014 Sunday Funday! Great afternoon at the peak! Jamie and Casey's (bow wow) first time. Oh yeah, there's a good-sized rattler due east and she just told us to leave her alone. Stoked to put the new box up here! —Scott, Jamie & Casey

MAY 29, 2014 Like a jacuzzi up here. Brain is fried like turkey on Thanksgiving. —Mike 'Big Mac' & Brett Wolfman

JUNE 13, 2014 Albert will not shut up! J. Roach, Madd Morgan, Aaron & Sluggo. Up Trabuco, down Bell. Hot. Albert is still yacking! Sweet day. Stoney day! Good luck Friday! —BGR

JUNE 15, 2014 Lots of flies. Hungry for breakfast. So are the flies. —Zackary Kiebach

OCTOBER 11, 2014 I am really happy because this is my first

peak that I've reached in the U.S.A. I am here with my loving family, Saghar (my kid) and Negin (my wife). —Mohammad Reza Bashiri

NOVEMBER 6, 2014 Hazy but clear enough to see a little definition and color of Catalina. You can hear the updrafts the crows are using as they circle above. It's quiet otherwise. Actually, I did chat with my friend on Facebook. I'm assuming Santiago is helping out. Otherwise, beautiful serenity. Remember: Always choose on the basis of love. —Jordan Davis

JANUARY 4, 2015 It is in places such as this and on mountains where I can touch the sky that I feel closest to you, my heart. —Hisham Zawil

JANUARY 17, 2015 First Pinos summit of 2015. Rose Canyon start, up Trabuco then down

Yeager with Matt, Troy, Ben and Mark. Another great day in SoCal! —Tom Robe

JANUARY 25, 2015 Santa Ana winds blowing for a clear day. Looks like I can reach out and touch Catalina Island. I love you all. —Mike Biello

FEBRUARY 21, 2015 Mountain biked from San Juan. Never again! —Matt Holley

FEBRUARY 21, 2015 Almost had to drink my urine. —Rob Boud

MARCH 8, 2015 Climb mountains not so the world can see you, but so you can Instagram it. —Anonymous

MARCH 28, 2015 Beautiful Saturday morning trail rage! Earned ourselves a few fresh brews at Cismontane! —Matt V.

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 **GIANT.**

PHOTO: JAMES FINN

rubber match

THE SPECIALIZED GROUND CONTROL TIRE PAIRED PERFECTLY WITH EARLY MOUNTAIN BIKES

WHEN IS A TIRE NOT JUST A TIRE? WHEN IT'S CALLED the Ground Control. If that sounds like fawning, here's some context. Today, you can swath your rims in whatever floats your boat: skinny tires, fat tires, morbidly obese tires, mud tires, hardpack tires. Back in 1986, none of that existed. All you had to choose from were a handful of treads designed for either BMX or touring bikes. Mountain biking was a brand-new thing coasting on old, shitty tires.

And then, out of the wilderness, strode Specialized Bicycles' Ground Control. The tire had street cred before there was even a name for that sort of thing. Back in the early '80s, the most innovative component designers were three guys out of Marin County: Steve Potts, Charlie Cunningham and Mark Slate. They called their collective Wilderness Trail Bikes, and their components became the blueprint for much of what Suntour and Shimano would later produce. The Ground Control was the first tire designed by the Marin County dream team—Cunningham came up with the tread design, Slate drew the schematics, Potts carved the 3-D model and, Jacquie Phelan, the most dominant woman racer of the era (and no slouch with the written word) gave the tire its name.

Specialized licensed the design from WTB. Bryant Bainbridge, a relatively new employee at Specialized at the time, was friendly with the WTB crew. Bainbridge, like everyone else, was frustrated with the status quo. "A lot of the tires back then were horrible," he recalls. He saw the Ground Control's potential and quickly convinced Special-

ized's brass to champion the tire.

"What Charlie had done with tread was incredible," says Bainbridge. "Everything before the Ground Control was basically a mini motocross tire—just a grid of small tread blocks. No one had seen anything like the Ground Control."

The tire featured a seemingly scattershot configuration of rectangular blocks and claw-shaped knobs, but the design was anything but random.

"Up until then, tread design was almost just an aesthetic touch," explains Cunningham, "a matter of making tires look cool. Each of those knobs on the Ground Control has a very specific job to do and was shaped to do it, whether that is providing for traction while accelerating, braking traction, lateral traction in corners or suspension. Specialized did a good job with the casing. It was very supple, which is critical. And they made it durable."

Specialized handed out 500 sets of the new Ground Control tires at Crested Butte Fat Tire Bike Week in August of 1986 and word spread like wildfire. This was a tire that dug into corners and wouldn't let go. "The grip was outstanding," says Bainbridge. "A total game-changer."

The Ground Control became the first universally loved mountain biking tire. "We couldn't make enough of them," says Bainbridge. "We had no idea it was going to sell like it did. Honestly, we just saw the potential in the design. We were riders. We just wanted better tires for our bikes. It was really that simple." ▢



For a more in-depth version of this story, check out bikemag.com

by vernon felton | photo: van swae

WHERE *all* TRAILS HEAD

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by nicole formosa | photo: sterling lorence

ranch hand

JUNE 24, 2014 | 8:17 A.M. | DUBOIS, WYOMING

WHEN CAM MCCAUL AND TOM VAN STEENBERGEN WERE SCULPTING THE TAKEOFF FOR VAN STEENBERGEN'S MASSIVE 70-foot frontflip at Turtle Ranch last summer, they got an unexpected hand from the ranch's resident cowboy, Robin Wiltshire.

The flip was for a scene in Anthill Films' new movie "Unreal," and took place at the ranch in northwest Wyoming, which Wiltshire owns. Wiltshire is a horse trainer, whose Clydesdales have appeared in Budweiser's famous Super Bowl ads. His picturesque ranch and well-trained animals have also starred in Coors, Chevrolet and Wells Fargo spots. So when a group of mountain bikers rented his ranch, Wiltshire was intrigued. This wasn't your average Strong Men Drive Trucks and Drink Beer commercial.

Photographer Sterling Lorence, who captured the above image, picks up the story from there.

"He is cool and was so interested in how we work and how the boys were able to find and build sick stunts on his land. He has lots of tools and machinery and knows how to use them all," Lorence says. "This was the takeoff air to Tom's 70-foot frontflip and the day before, Tom and Cam McCaul realized it had to be larger so we spent the day growing it. Robin decided to help us and he drove over his track skid steer and helped the boys pile up the takeoff.

"I thought it was ironic to see a cowboy of yesterday be so capable in a machine, and also to want to see the boys throw down and help out the cowboys of today." 🐾



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by kristin butcher | photo: ryan creary

retail therapy

AN ODE TO THE PEDDLERS OF PEDALING DREAMS

THE ODDLY PLEASANT STENCH OF CHAIN LUBE MINGLES WITH that of pristine rubber, grips untainted by sweat and impending adventure. Hints of dirt and asphalt saunter in on the heels of customers who always stay longer than intended. When the savory fumes of breakfast burritos invade through the back door, the nose of a seemingly comatose shop dog begins to dance.

High tones of corrugated cardboard in the air indicate new bikes being assembled while the fuely scent of degreaser means somewhere a mechanic is performing CPR on an old bottom bracket. The dissipating aroma of magazine cologne samples lets us know we just missed that douchebag who wears a fanny pack and won't shut up about his Strava stats.

This isn't just some building filled with shiny parts, unstained chamois and the perpetual aroma of grease. This is a room full of possibilities. It's a room full of hope. This is the bike shop that felt just right.

The mechanics in the back are the bartenders of the bike

world, simultaneously bleeding brakes and truing wheels while chatting about everything from the new trail to the physics of fat bikes. Yammering away, they maintain perfect eye contact as their fingers flit through tiny plastic drawers with part names written on masking tape that peeled off long ago. Like a pianist whose playing doesn't pause when the stage goes black, the mechanics' eternally grimy hands find what they need by feel.

There's a perfect blend of fancy-pants bike bling to drool over along with hodgepodge bins filled with random parts marked down to whatever felt right. The pretty parts are for ogling while the black hole of cheap parts guides you through a tactile tour of mountain bike component history.

Customer after customer walks through the door, the half-hearted jingle of well-worn bell announcing each person's grand entrance. Some show apprehension in their eyes, the look of a stranger in a strange land. They're not quite sure what to ask, who to ask, or why there are eight different kinds of spandex hanging

**THE PART
OF YOU
THAT WAS
SCARED
FELL OFF
4 MILES
AGO.**

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on the wall. All the customer knows is that the springs on his bike go ker-THUNK every time he gets on it.

The mechanic realizes that this bike was never good even at its best. He also knows that many lifelong love affairs with riding begin with a crappy bike, so he tunes it up best he can while internally ranting against bikes more concerned with looking cool than being functional. All this customer needs is wheels, a frame, brakes that work more often than not and a price tag that doesn't turn him off from riding before he even starts. The mechanic recommends a few easy trails and mentions last year's bikes are about to go on sale.

When a home mechanic walks in with a project gone horribly awry, the shop hand looks the job over and examines the bag of extra parts jibing, "You do realize a mallet isn't a fine-adjustment tool, right?" Ball busting in this situation is a free service, mostly because every shop hand has a similar story from back when they were just another home mechanic with an incomplete toolset and an outdated copy of "Zinn and the Art of Mountain Bike Maintenance." When the customer leaves, the mechanic breaks out the fine-adjustment mallet and puts the extra parts back in place.

A customer boasting about folding a chainring rolls his mud-caked bike to the back leaving a path of dirt chunks on the floor and turning the spotless workspace into a 7th grade ecology experiment. It's the same guy who cornered the mechanic on the trails last week after flattening twice, but hadn't brought a single tool besides himself on the ride. It's 15 minutes until closing. No, the bike won't be ready tomorrow morning.

A familiar face appears five minutes before closing. She has a few extra pounds around the middle and stars in her eyes. She's been wandering into the shop for weeks, asking questions, test-riding bikes, and running her hands on every item in the store. Until now, she only experienced mountain biking on a too-large bike from 10 years ago that a friend of a friend sold her for \$100. At the time, a Benjamin seemed like the most someone should reasonably spend on a bike.

The bike encouraged her to get in better shape, ride a little longer, explore farther, and it gave her enough of a taste to let her know she wanted more. So she saved and researched and rode her rattlebox of a bike until she could buy a 'real mountain bike.' The grin on her face announces that the time has finally come. The bike isn't anything special, at least not compared to the celebration of carbon and technology filling some of the racks, but it's the nicest bike she's ever owned. Years into the future, long after her first bike turns into a quiver, this bike will remain her favorite.

She heads to the door with the same look of untamed excitement she wore when she was 10 and her grandma surprised her with a pink and purple 10-speed—the first bike she didn't inherit from her older brother. It's 15 minutes past closing, but the shop hand doesn't mind. Not today. Not for a bike this valuable.

The customer doesn't notice the familiar jingle of the front door as she rolls the bike out of the shop, her mind clouded with anticipation. She's busy thinking about getting home and tearing off the hangtags and the plastic pie-plate and reflectors that keep the lawyers from getting their panties in a wad. It's dark, but there's a full moon and she's not sure she can wait until morning for her maiden voyage.

The tools find their way back to their rightful places. The lights go out. The door jingles for the last time tonight as the deadbolt clicks into place. Just another day at the office. 🍷



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by mike ferrentino | photo: bruno long

accept, adapt, move on

MAKING PEACE WITH THE EVOLUTION OF MOUNTAIN-BIKE TECHNOLOGY

“YEAH, I’M READY TO START LOOKING FOR A NEW BIKE, BUT I think I may just wait a year and see if things settle down,” said the carpenter as he eyeballed the 27.5-inch wheels on my six-month-old bike. “What do you think about that whole plus thing that everyone’s talking about now?”

This was the third time in the second week of April of this year that someone had asked me that. The first week of April, it came up in conversation about five times. By the third week of April I had stopped talking to other cyclists. Here’s where whoever classified me on Wikipedia as follows – “*Mike has supported the return of “old school” mountain biking. Specifically, he defines “old school” MTB as light, relatively fragile, cross-country mountain bikes, made with steel...*” – might expect me to engage in some lengthy, anti-technology rant. Whoever that was, however, would be sadly disappointed. They deserve to be, since they were totally wrong anyway.

Evolution is good. Change is good. Everything that is happening, whether the changes are slow and incremental or a staggering blitzkrieg, is improving mountain bikes. I say, Bring On The New

Shit! Just don’t expect me to want to make a crusade for or against any of it (except e-bikes, because they will be a scourge on the land, mark my words), and don’t expect me to engage in any rabid loyalty based around a frame material, or a wheel size, or an axle diameter, or a hub width, or a headset cup.

I get that people are bummed out that there are now EVEN MORE options for how they can choose their bikes, and that they feel as if there is some concerted effort to render their perfectly functional bikes obsolete by the dark forces that collude to secretly control the bike industry. And I spent enough time squinting at bottom bracket cups and spindles way back when that I know exactly what an inventory hell this profusion of small parts in lots of different sizes represents when it comes to keeping things in stock. But at the same time, I don’t really understand why we, cyclists in general, are so freaked out by change.

We have this expectation as cyclists, rooted in some utilitarian sensibility that goes back to before the dawn of the 20th century, that bikes should be easily repairable from parts commonly found

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in bike shops all around the world. We also have this expectation that the performance of our bikes should be able to improve, that our bikes should become stronger, lighter, more capable, have better suspension, more powerful brakes and continue to evolve along these lines. It gets all messy when these two sets of expectations collide, and we expect this evolution of deliverable performance to occur alongside the ability to use the same parts to repair our bikes that we've been using for, ohhh, a hundred years. Suggesting that these two sets of expectations may not be entirely compatible would be a serious understatement. The co-existence of these two sets of expectations is why we were still using little pieces of wire with hinged cams on the end to hold our wheels in place up until just a couple years ago.

So, to the "whole plus thing" that the carpenter was talking about, and the feather-ruffling 'new axle standard' that goes along with it, here's a compressed evolution: 26-inch wheels as we know them showed up on cruisers in the 1930s. If I recall, Schwinn had purchased a surplus of motor scooter parts, and this is what cruisers got. Nothing happened until

some Daisy Duke wearing longhairs decided to start railing old cruisers around in the 1970s. They used those same size wheels, and conveniently there was an alloy rim that could be sourced from BMX cruisers. Done deal. Everyone was happy, more or less. Then, 20 years in, a couple people got restless and wanted to use road bike rims (700c) and bigger tires, one of those people being one of the original Daisy Duke wearing longhairs. Boom. Twenty-nine-inch wheels, and the beginning of an endless 'this is the new way of better everythingness.' At the same time, a quiet guy was resurrecting yet another wheel diameter that had been around for almost a century (650b), and it gathered steam as a feasible middle ground between the two already existing wheel sizes. MEANWHILE, disc brakes and suspension had come of age well and truly, and the old wire quick release as we know it was finally dead and buried. Hallelujah. And while all this was happening, fat bikes were creeping in. They have had at least as much time evolving as the 29-inch deal, but were considered such a fringe that nobody really took them seriously. Then in the past few years, people started to think about the shape of

their tires and the possibilities that could be found by going to wider rims.

Then someone said, "Hey, we got these fat rims, and these different diameter wheels, how about we try some tires that aren't as fat as fatbike tires, but are fatter than the skinny meat we've been riding FOR THE PAST 40 YEARS?"

Might need some wider axles, but what the heck, how bad could it be? Forced obsolescence? Industry collusion? Or maybe just the maturation of several convergent concepts?

As I write this, I am restoring an old Merlin-built, Tomac-era Raleigh for a friend. Titanium lugs, carbon-wrapped aluminum tubes, Manitou 1 fork. The parts have all been easy to find. It is 'obsolete' but fully supported if someone is willing to do some searching. If I was forced to surrender the evolution that has made bikes so awesome over the past 20 years in order to have some homogenous ability to source parts (but still be cursed with a press-fit bottom bracket! Oh, the irony), if I was banished to riding this old Merlin while fully aware of how far we have come, I would cry. Here's lookin' at you, plus-size tires and wider axles. Looking forward to meeting you. 🍻

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A photograph of a cluttered room, likely a child's bedroom or a storage area for sports gear. In the background, a mountain bike is leaning against a wall. Shelves above and around the bike are filled with various items, including a bicycle wheel, a helmet, and some papers. In the foreground, a table is covered with a pile of clothes, including a bright blue t-shirt with "MOUNTAIN BIKE" printed on it, and a red t-shirt. A pizza box is also visible on the table. The overall scene suggests a space of active use and storage.

“I bought my son a mountain bike for his birthday, but I didn’t know it was a gateway to the unReal.”

Diane MacFarlane, North Vancouver B.C.

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ESCAPE IN LA

the bounty of trails in the mountains near the city of
angels feeds urban dwellers' need for adventure

BY RYAN CLEEK | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADRIAN MARCOUX



Ty Hathaway and Morgan Meredith seek the serene side of L.A. in the San Gabriel Mountains. The iconic Hollywood sign looms over L.A.'s most vaunted establishments and some of the best riding in the city.



"OF COURSE I'LL MAKE IT A DOUBLE

for two dollars more," I reply to the bartender at Terminal 4. "He must be new," I mutter to myself. Having spent most of my adult life living out of a suitcase as a Los Angeles-based writer and photographer, these were weekly LAX interactions. The stool next to me is yanked out of sight and instantly leased by a lumbering, 50-something gent proudly sporting his team's baseball cap and matching sweatsuit. We exchange pleasantries, contort our bodies to avoid kicking over luggage and jockey for pole position on the lone cell phone fountain of youth below the counter between us.

"From L.A., or heading home?" asks the stranger.

"I am home, just traveling for work," I reply.

"You live here, huh. I'm sorry," snarks the half Tony La Russa-half Wilford Brimley traveler.

I'm intrigued. Why do so many visitors hold negative opinions about a place I find wonderful? The reality is, to truly enjoy a city's offerings one needs to know where to visit and experience those moments in good company. In response to his curious statement, and in recognition of his proudly coordinated St. Louis Cardinals attire, I reply, "Well, I guess not everyone can live in Missouri. Hope you enjoyed your vacation."

DISSECTING THE SPRAWL

Described as 70 suburbs in search of a city, L.A. is lassoed within the Pacific Ocean, mountain ranges and foothills. It's those natural boundaries (and lack of public transportation) that contribute to the rage-inducing serpentine traffic nightmares for which L.A. is known. Although the mountains are the iconic backdrop to Tinseltown's incredible landscape, they often only receive mass attention from Angelinos when they're on fire—when local news helicopters hover above zillion-dollar homes propped up like Godzilla's hillside lawn flamingos, endangered by the half-inch of rainfall and looming mudslides

from the annual 'Storm of The Century.'

So, how does one wrangle a story about mountain biking on such a far-reaching city and dynamic riding community? Approach it like L.A.'s popular celebrity online news source, "TMZ." Obviously. Standing for Thirty Mile Zone, "TMZ" focuses on celebrity 'news' within the 30-mile radius of the historic studio zone at the intersection of Beverly and La Cienega Boulevards. Downtown L.A. will be our hub of this mountain bike-specific "TMZ," working our way toward the Angeles National Forest through Silver Lake, and westward to the Pacific Ocean via classic Santa Monica Mountain terrain. We'll zoom in the magnifying glass through the paparazzi-filled Coffee Beans and Tea Leafs and barren carpool lanes to ride with some of the aforementioned good company, all of whom embody the individuality of the city and the sport.

GOLDEN RULES

It's a Monday afternoon and there's a manageable flow of foot-traffic through Golden Saddle Cyclery, 4 miles from downtown in the trendy and energetic neighborhood of Silver Lake. Most of the neighborhood is huddled around Sunset Boulevard, and its side streets are packed with unique boutiques, tattoo artists, bars and restaurants.

Each building you stroll past has the essence of an interesting story lingering behind its gentrified walls. A couple blocks from Golden Saddle sits Silversun Liquors, where members of the band A Couple of Couples would pick up late-night beverages after their Silver Lake Lounge gigs. The band changed members, and then their name to Silversun Pickups. The story behind the Golden Saddle Cyclery walls holds its own among the neighborhood lore—both real and perceived.

"Friends stop in for a post-ride beer, or to eat their burrito, with no intention of purchasing anything," says Golden Saddle Cyclery co-owner Ty Hathaway.

The floor space isn't crammed with inventory itching to be hustled. The main display case, where a customer would expect to find sparkly, high-zoot widgets and componentry, is instead loaded with conversation-sparking memorabilia of cycling days past. The uninitiated patron must wonder how the lights stay on.

The concept for Golden Saddle began when friends, Kyle Kelley, Ty Hathaway and Thomas Wood (Woody), joked that they should open their own shop to create a sense of community, a place for riders to hang out in the area—something they felt had gone missing in the L.A. cycling scene.

"Everyone at our shop is super knowledgeable," says



*the Angeles National Forest rises 10,000 feet
and the San Gabriel*

Hathaway. “For example, Woody, our lead mechanic, was a wrench for the U.S. Olympic Cycling Team prior to working with us. Whether someone is looking for a custom-built touring bike or a downhill machine, we’ll help them get the best build we can, drawing from our own backgrounds to get it done.” Ty grew up in Tujunga, California, in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, which tower northeast of L.A., and his childhood home sits at the base of the Angeles National Forest. Ty describes himself as “just a bike rider,” but he is actually an accomplished off-road motorcyclist—he’s raced the Baja 1000—and in 2014 he was the top American finisher at the Trans-Provence mountain bike stage race in France.

The Angeles National Forest rises 10,000 feet above Los Angeles, and the San Gabriel Mountains are nestled within the range. On this morning, photographer Adrian Marcoux and I are joining Ty and Morgan Meredith of Mission Workshop for one of the most terrain-diverse rides in Southern California: the Mount Lowe descent, which drops nearly 5,000 feet over 7 miles. It is possible to grind up 7 miles of abandoned roads to make the ride into a loop, but the consensus is to utilize the Southern California Outdoor Adventures shuttle. The word ‘shuttle’ conjures images of Ninja Turtle-armored riders pinballing along with glowing-hot rear

brake rotors. Yes, they’re occasionally out there. However, the tight, jagged and undulating Mount Lowe singletrack is ideal for capable mid-travel bikes. The SCOA shuttle runs nearly every morning, and on this day we shared a ride with Golden Saddle regular and passionate cyclist, Ed Ma, of the band The Glitch Mob.

Within a few minutes of ascending the Angeles Crest Highway, the sheer abruptness of the San Gabriels walls us off from the concrete commotion where our day began. Our ride starts at the Eaton Saddle near the entrance of the Mueller tunnel. Despite California’s long-running drought, our time in the San Gabriels in February was filled with rain, sleet and snow, and the much-needed moisture created an insanely atypically lush view of the greater L.A. landscape.

ALL-TIME LOWE

If there’s a single defining characteristic of the Mount Lowe descent it’s exposure. The chundery and sharp-edged terrain self-regulates speed with scrub-brush and yucca-plant passageways that limit our line of sight. As trails connect and meander through the carved-out mountain-side, dozens of high-consequence corners are capable of humbling even the most experienced bike handlers. Lose



*above Los Angeles,
Mountains are nestled within the range*



focus and over-shoot one of these turns, or clip a handlebar on a rock outcropping at speed and you've got a problem.

As we rip through the Echo Mountain Chutes to the Middle Sam Merrill trail toward Sunset Ridge, and the finally to the El Prieto trail, we visit remnants of 'Earth's Greatest Mountain Ride,' Mount Lowe's Incline Railway cable car, which carried visitors in the late 1890s up the 3,000-foot incline with grades up to 62-percent to the now-abandoned resort and tavern. A little farther down, the telescopes of Inspiration Point indicate that we're nearly halfway through the day's ride.

Along the Sunset trail, the meandering singletrack darts and dashes into and away from the hillside and the rock formations cleverly spaced by Mother Nature require confident and creative line choices. Then the trail opens up to a ripping-fast ridgeline. At this point in the descent, we're torn between stopping and talking about how sick the ride has been, or charging forward and keeping the good-time tachometer redlined. The landscape begins to transition from exposed, loose and rough to a lush canyon of swooping rock-filled singletrack of the El Prieto trail. Dozens of nearly 180-degree switchbacks spiral us into the canyon, signalling the final few minutes of this Los Angeles treasure. The terrain mellows and simultaneously so does the vegetation, from leg-piercing yucca plants to welcoming oak trees.

We regroup before the final series of switchbacks and prepare ourselves for re-entry into the L.A. atmosphere. I think about the beers and burritos waiting for us back at Golden Saddle.

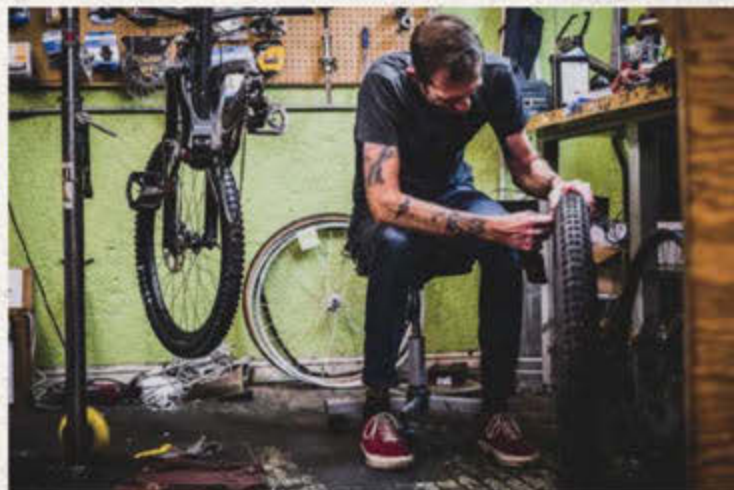
FAMILY AFFAIR

"Honey, this is Le Roy's. If you want smaller portions go to Denny's," says the waitress as she slides a stack of powdered-sugar-freckled hubcaps in front of Adrian. It's 7 a.m. and we've joined Jon Buckell and his grandfather David at their regular pre-ride breakfast place 10 miles east of Pasadena in Monrovia.

"Jon and I got into mountain biking at the same time," says David. "He was a young boy, and it was a fun way for us to get out and explore. We had no idea what we were doing at first, but we figured it out eventually," he jokes with a jolly, Sean Connery-esque accent.

Although they didn't have the most capable





Clockwise from top left: Hathaway takes it all in; the L.A. bike scene is as diverse as its residents; Jon Buckell and his grandfather David have been mountain biking together since Jon was a little kid, forging an unbreakable bond between the two; super-mechanic Woody toils at Golden Saddle Cyclery; Jon Buckell revels in riding a rare patch of green; downtime is fun-time at Golden Saddle.





Some rides are for the trails and some are for the views, and Kevin Waterbury knows them all, especially near Santa Monica, where the L.A. native often rides from the beach to the Backbone trail in the nearby Santa Monica Mountains.



bikes and equipment, or the conditioning to endure the steep and relentless San Gabriel terrain, they were hooked.

“My family saw how much I enjoyed riding, and it was a fun way for my grandfather and I to explore new places together,” explains Jon, who is the lead mechanic at Pasadena’s InCycle bike shop. “It really became a team effort between my grandpa and grandma Annie, as she would drive us all over the San Gabriels giving us the chance to ride so many new places. She kept a journal of each ride she took us on, the locations and distances, and even wrote down the rides we did together that she wasn’t able to be a part of. There are certain trails in those mountains I’ve done hundreds of times since I was a kid, and thanks to her keeping track of those moments I can recall those rides today.”

“Jon has certainly come a long way with his riding,” David says, while failing to hold back a proud grin.

“My goal is to win the Oregon Enduro Series pro overall title this year,” Jon says with a sincere matter of factness between bites of toast.

There aren’t many people who can make a statement like this (and have a shot at actually pulling it off) without instigating an in-your-dreams eye roll from their riding buddies. However, in 2014, Jon raced two of the series’ five events, and at the opening round in Hood River he finished just off the pro podium in sixth place on the heels of the faces you can’t turn a page of a magazine without seeing in advertisements. Later that season, at the series’ Mt. Hood/Sandy Ridge event, he finished on the podium in fourth place, one spot above the racer who clinched the North American Enduro Tour championship at that very event. I’ve witnessed Jon, now 26, evolve from curious teenage racer to one of the best riders in California. However, one doesn’t have to spend nearly that much time with him before his humble personality and genuine love and appreciation for riding becomes apparent. He comes across as the kind of guy who’d write you a thank you letter for lending him a zip tie for a race plate.

The competitive spirit must be hereditary. David, now 72, a former British Merchant Marine turned general contractor and minister, enjoys racing cross-country and downhill in the Southern California series. “He loves going to the races, and has a few guys in his age group he likes to battle with out there,” says his proud grandson.

FLAT-OUT FUN

Within minutes of leaving Le Roy’s we’re entering the Big Santa Anita Canyon in pursuit of the Chantry Flats Recreation Area.

“At a consistent pace, this Chantry Flats loop only takes about 90 minutes,” explains Jon. “It’s super-convenient in relation to the city life below, and is really just a gem of a ride.”

Big Santa Anita Canyon is also a window into the

continued on page 124



s kid to w

KLUNKER

CULTURE

LIVES ON

IN THE

HILLS

ABOVE L.A.

by ryan cleek

photography by
adrian marcoux

we couldn't have been standing on the UCLA campus for more than a single minute when our mood shifted from curiosity to apprehensive giddiness. The reason was Carl's question. "Want to see me air the campus sign?"

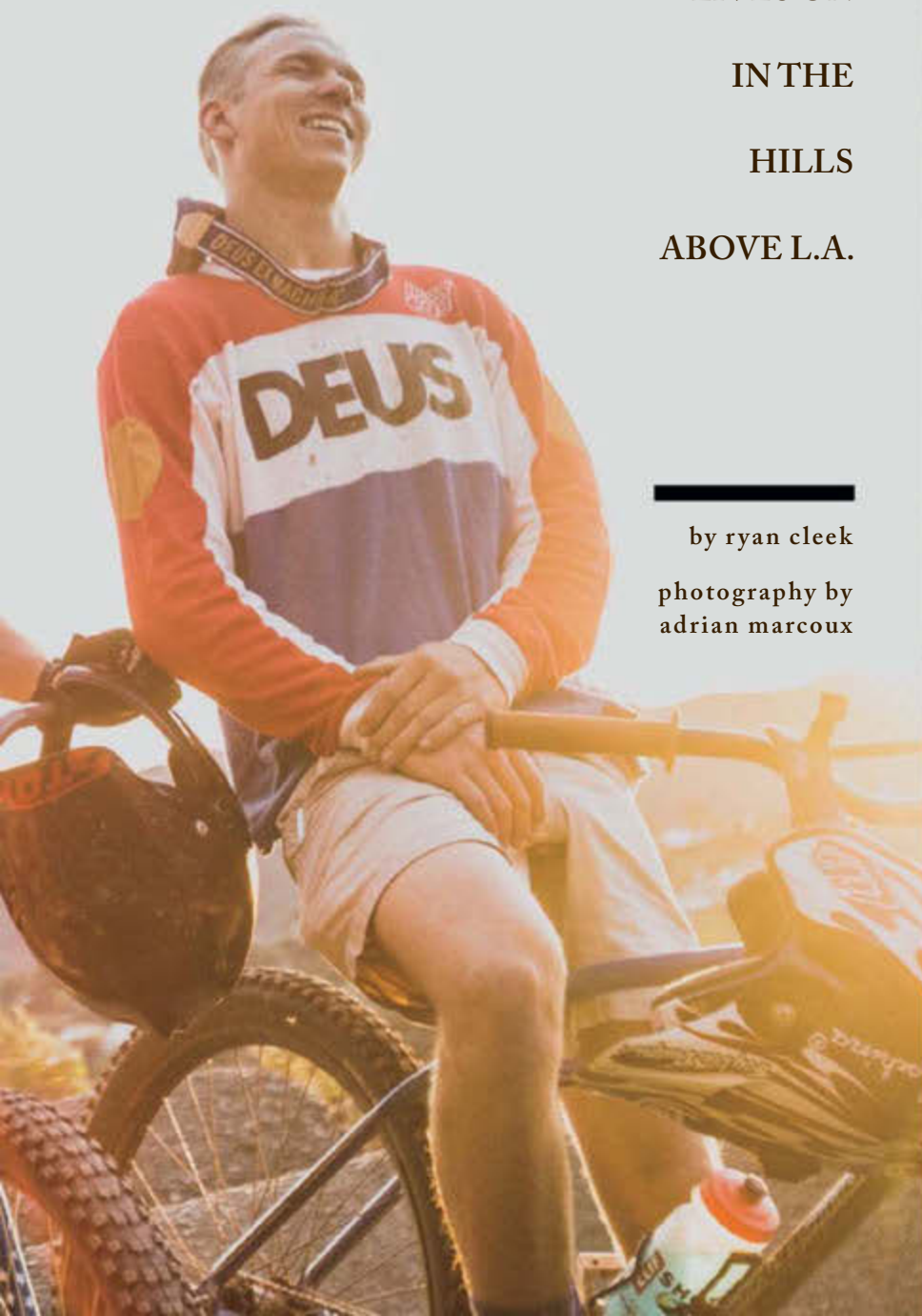
"Absolutely," I responded, while simultaneously realizing I had no idea what he was talking about. Out of the corner of my eye I glanced at our photographer, Adrian, to see if he shared my sentiment. Verbal confirmation wasn't necessary for us to understand that this was either going to be one hell of a memorable day, or the quickest shoot ever.

Seeing a guy jump steps or launch over concrete barriers while riding street on a mountain bike isn't unique. However, Carl isn't some skinny-jeaned, half-shell-helmeted crank-flipper—I'm talking about 300-pound UCLA nose guard Carl Hulick sending it on his fully rigid, coaster-brake-equipped klunker. Go ahead, say it out loud.

"You don't have to do anything you don't feel like," I tell Carl. "I don't want Coach Mora on my bad side."

"Are you kidding?" replies the environmental studies major. "He follows me on Instagram and has seen the videos of my friends and I riding our klunkers. Although he feels we're crazy, Coach thinks it's pretty cool."

Cool is right. It's one thing to try to be original and separate oneself from the herd. It's another when originality is a byproduct of simply having fun doing what you want in your own style. The latter is why I'm going riding with Carl and his friends.



Clockwise from this page:
Carl, Paul and Tucker
practice synchronized
klunking; Carl's idea of
four wheels is different
than most; mid-ride
stoke; these guys have
their own brand of cool;
friends who klunk to-
gether, stay together.



whoops, where it is

The 405 freeway divides the University of California, Los Angeles campus from the eastern ridge of the Santa Monica Mountains, where the Whoops trail lives. It's been featured in countless videos and photo shoots, and a simple online search reveals detailed directions to the no-longer-undisclosed location.

Although a couple of years have slipped past since I last rode there, it remains the single most important stretch of dirt in my life. Not only as a 21-year-old kid did it become my five-day-a-week-until-dark riding zone on my \$800 hardtail, but it represents countless hours of personal introspection while viewing L.A. from above, attempting to sort how the cog of my being fits into the universe's grand machine. Perched above some of the city's most audacious mansions, I met lifelong friends and future business partners, all while dodging rattlesnakes, lizards, bobcats and bees.

The Whoops aren't difficult to locate now but when the trail was introduced to me 16 years ago, it was an invitation-only type of place. Regulars who rode there actively maintained the 30 or more jumps, but also realized the fruit of their labor wasn't supposed to exist. Keeping our mouths shut about its location in one of the most expensive zip codes in the country was believed to be the best way for it to remain our overlooked personal playground. My time as unofficial steward to that zone has passed, but in respect of today's regulars, if you want directions to the Whoops, I will show you, but I won't tell you.

Riders looking for well-groomed BMX-style dirt jumps will be disappointed. Most of the features are linked-up, rock-embedded mounds of dirt twisting through bushes alongside a canyon. I've consulted board members of CORBA—the Los Angeles-based mountain bike advocacy group founded in 1987—and lifelong



Whoops-riding locals, and have yet to find a consensus on the trail's history. The most commonly repeated story has something to do with a real estate developer putting a fire road in the wrong area of the mountain, and subsequently instructing crews to place mounds of dirt along the length of the road to keep vehicles from driving on it. The land was then acquired by a utility company. And today, decades later, I reminisce about the positive influence that forgotten dirt road had on so many of us.

wheels of time

The process of the senior nose guard loading his Transition Klunker onto his back before mounting his scooter is an impressive one, which must be seen to be appreciated. After a 10-minute drive along Sunset Boulevard, we turn up toward the foot of the Whoops

to meet Tucker Hopkins and Paul Jackson, Carl's klunking buddies.

"I kind of ride for Deus Ex Machina (motorcycle shop) out of Venice, and one time they put on a klunker ride in the Santa Monica Mountains," explains Carl. "My friend Tucker is a lifeguard on Venice Beach, and has a background racing motocross. We got to know each other on that Deus klunker ride, and had so much fun we realized we needed to make riding our klunkers together a regular thing.

"Paul was a neighbor in my apartment, and is currently working on his master's degree in engineering. He's a really good jumper. After seeing how much fun we were having klunking, he decided he had to have one of his own."

A native of nearby Orange County, Carl grew up riding modern mountain bikes and used to race downhill on a Specialized Demo 9. So, why the drastic change from the most technologically advanced

form of mountain bike to what's basically a burly beach cruiser?

"I love the simplicity of the klunker," explains Carl. "I can basically do a complete tune-up with a screwdriver and an open-ended wrench. When I was riding downhill, I'd always break forks, handlebars and derailleurs. On the klunker, I've really only bent some rims and forks, but that's what 3-bills jumping to flat can do to a rigid bike.

"My Transition Klunker actually handles really well. It's long, slack and is super stable on fast and loose trails, which is surprising, because one would expect a bike of this style to be a death machine on any real trail."

There's not a big contingent of Los Angeles klunker riders, but there have been underground coaster brake events and races in the Santa Monica Mountains for years. Paul de Valera of Atomic Cycles in Van Nuys puts on a few coaster brake events a year, and according to Carl, Paul is the go-to guy for any kind of old bike service or coaster brake repairs.

Obviously, not being equipped with modern components can pose a challenge to riding technical terrain, but according to Carl, that's what makes klunking fun.

"Relying on the coaster brake is probably the biggest challenge," he says. "Whether we're screaming down fire roads or descending steep, technical singletrack, having to pedal backwards to slow down can be awkward. And, there's no guarantee

the brake's even going to work. I've got the technique down pretty well now, but it's really common to unintentionally hit the brakes when I'm trying to have my feet level. When I first started riding the klunker on real trails I would blow through corners and end up in the bushes by unintentionally skidding. Klunking is just a different experience altogether. I don't look at it as a compromised version of regular mountain biking, because it's truly its own thing. No matter what trail you're riding on the a klunker it's going to get sketchy, but be really fun."

While visiting the Whoops with Carl, Tucker and Paul, and witnessing their genuine enthusiasm for the rough and loose sensation the klunkers deliver, I couldn't help but feel silly aboard my 5-inch-travel, disc-braked equipped, carbon-fiber super bike designed to mute the very terrain input they're excited to feel.

When I was their age, I didn't fully understand the impact that abandoned road would have on my life. But each time I watched the sun set over one of the biggest cities in the world, I always had the sense I was standing exactly where I was supposed to be. One day, I'm sure Carl, Tucker and Paul, will be able to point to that very spot in the mountains and recognize the impact it had on who they became as people and riders.

In case you were wondering, Carl greased the landing over the UCLA campus sign, marking the beginning of one hell of a memorable day afterall. 🍌

090 | skid row



This page: Paul comes up for air at the Whoops; sign language; for Carl, easy tune-ups are part of the klunker appeal; the klunking culture runs deep among this trio of buddies.

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“DAVE JUST VOMITED.”

I looked over to see my buddy Dave Callender propped lifelessly against a steel shipping container with an ice pack on his neck—a hollow shell of a man, with his mouth hanging open, his eyes glazed over and his face drained of all color. Clearly the unseasonal 95-degree March heat in San Diego had gotten to him. We still had 15 miles of riding left, but Dave would be rolling those last 15 miles in the back of an air-conditioned minivan, not on his bike.

Dave wasn't the only one. Out of 30 people who started the 5th annual All-Day Debacle (ADD), 23 finished. Even for those who finished, the punishing heat took its toll, leaving everyone covered in salt-encrusted Lycra and a layer of dirt that can only be accumulated on a 65-mile mountain bike ride that ascends nearly 8,000 feet.

by kurt gensheimer
photography by anthony smith









Top left: North County looks unassuming from the air, but its trails will test your mental strength; Erik DeKold (Bykving) ended the day worn, but happy; seeking relief at the hottest point of the day.



not your average 8 to 5

Started originally as an early season training ride to prep for spring races like the Whiskey Off-Road, the ADD has grown into an annual gathering of friends to celebrate the remarkable trails and public land connectivity of North County San Diego. With nicknames like ParmaJohnny, MacGary, Magic Hands, The Hoff, Wheelie King, Bykving, Crampzicki, Ranger Dave, T-Bag and Sparky, there's no shortage of characters on the ADD.

Completing one giant loop around North County, the 65-mile ADD starts and finishes in San Elijo Hills near San Marcos, a city situated about 35 miles north of downtown San Diego and 10 miles inland from the beach town of Carlsbad. Besides a couple of miles of pavement, the ride is nearly all a mix of singletrack and fire roads through the North County communities of Elfin Forest, Escondido, Rancho Bernardo, Poway, Rancho Peñasquitos and Rancho Santa Fe. The first edition of the ADD was in 2010, when Bykving and I managed to dupe two other friends, Dan and Cliff into riding all day with us, starting at 8 a.m. and finishing right around 5 p.m.—a tradition that still holds.

The ADD was also partially inspired by the annual Archipelago Ride, a 50-mile fundraiser ride started by the San Diego Mountain Biking Association to demonstrate the trails connectivity of North County. But the problem with the Archipelago is that it's a point-to-point, requiring a shuttle to get back to your car. The ADD is like the Archipelago on steroids, only it brings you back to where you started, eliminating the inconvenience of shuttling. We rode a complete loop for the first time in 2011, and in 2012 we repeated the route. But by 2013 we realized that we were riding the ADD in the wrong direction. Instead of counterclockwise, we needed to do it clockwise, mainly because of a trail known lovingly as Once is Enough.



Once is Enough is the most aptly named trail ever created. Essentially a decomposed granite service road that connects Lake Hodges with Elfin Forest, Once is Enough is 1.5 miles and about 1,000 vertical feet of brutally steep, loose, off-camber fire road with giant water bars every hundred yards, and it still takes the prize for the worst engineered 'trail' I've ever ridden. Going down it sucks enough, but going up it at mile 55 of the ADD was utter punishment, especially on a singlespeed with legs in full seize-mode. To this day I've never seen anyone on a singlespeed clean the whole thing.

So two years ago Bykving and I wised up and reversed the loop, descending Once is Enough about 10 miles into the ride. Although it's an unfortunate waste of hard-earned elevation, it makes the rest of the ride far more bearable by getting the majority of big climbs done in the first half of the ride, with mellow trail toward the end. But this is San Diego, and no matter which way one goes, there is always a gut-punch climb or three sitting between you and your destination.

The highlight for this year's ADD was the searing heat. In years past, we had to deal with nearly 90-degree temperatures on the trails in Poway, which sits about 20 miles inland from the ocean. But this year the heat was all-encompassing with no coastal re-

lief. San Diego has a prominent micro-climate; while it could be 75 degrees at the beach, for every mile inland you go, the heat cranks up a degree. But this year, it was 90 degrees and hotter everywhere we rode, with the mercury hitting triple digits at the top of the Ted Williams trail network in Poway.

While the heat was on some people's minds, the dreaded binky occupied others' thoughts. Each year the binky award goes to the first rider to throw in the towel, and that rider must carry it on the next year's ride, bequeathing it to the first person who folds. This year's recipient was Andrew Engelmann, who gave his first ADD a valiant go, but couldn't outlast the heat. By having someone drop his car off at the lunch stop, Andrew not only saved himself, but he also saved a few others like Dave, who eventually succumbed to heat stroke.

The ADD features a wide range of trail variety, and its true genius is that no matter where you are in the ride, you're never more than a couple miles from civilization, giving people the option to bail out whenever they reach their limit. Starting from the heart of San Elijo Hills, this year's course rolled through Lower Copper Canyon, a narrow singletrack enveloped in thick foliage, shade and a year-round stream, a rare treat in the



coastal desert of San Diego. Shotgun, Ass Clown, Reach Around and Shitty trail are just some of the crudely colorful nicknames the group gave a network of cutty little singletracks through Elfin Forest.

In an effort to avoid encountering dozens of hikers on the increasingly popular Way Up trail to Olivenhain

Reservoir, we took a secret squirrel route up a trail called Collarbone. One look at Collarbone and the name makes complete sense; man-eating ruts, rocks peppered everywhere and rogue Manzanita waiting to yank your handlebars out from beneath you. The trail has claimed its fair share of clavicles over the years. Thankfully we were going up Collarbone, but even *up* is challenging—only ParmaJohnny and Wheelie King cleaned the incredibly technical and steep climb.

Next came the Once is Enough descent, then a roll along Lake Hodges onto the fast and flowing singletrack of the Highland Valley trail. After a mean hike-a-bike to bypass a recently closed route, we worked our way into Poway where the trails are a curious mix of multi-use single and double track twisting along countless backyards. It took me months of riding in Poway to figure out this maze of trails that not many mountain bikers



know about. While they're not the choicest of trails, they're crucial connectors that are still pretty fun, so long as you don't crash headlong into a strategically placed cholla cactus like Dave did. Heat stroke *and* cholla; Dave had a rough day.

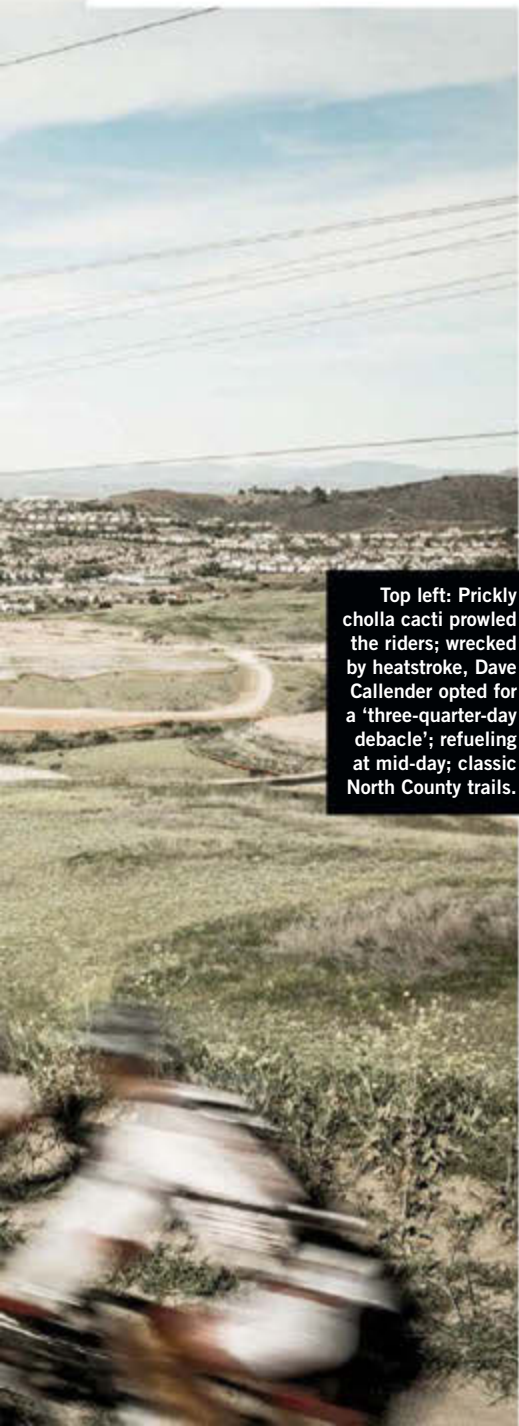
dirt dessert, pulled pork and beer

After climbing and descending behind Pomerado Hospital in Poway, the route entered the Ted Williams trails behind Meadowbrook School, a network known more by downhillers than cross-country riders. After winding up a gradual ascent skirting massive jumps and rock drops, we were rewarded with commanding 360-degree views from the coast to Mount Woodson. The rowdiest descent of the day came next. I don't even know if the trail has a name, but it's 2 miles of high-speed, rocky, rutted singletrack down in Poway Road with a couple tire-on-buttcrack pitches thrown in for good measure. It's definitely one of the best

descents in North County, and a treat that not many have found.

After a mellow cruise along the Trans-County trail, we reached Peñasquitos Canyon, where we took a much needed lunch break at Bryan and Donna Jones' house. From there it was over Del Mar Mesa, through McGonigle Canyon and up to Black Mountain Park via the Del Sur trail network. After descending off the ridge along Lusardi Loop, we hit the infamous Jungle trail, a primitive, rocky singletrack highlighted by a thick eucalyptus grove and a short hike on rocks through swampy, 10-foot-high switch grass that looks more like the La Ruta de los Conquistadores race course in Costa Rica than the suburbs of San Diego.

After pedaling through the stunningly wealthy neighborhoods of Rancho Santa Fe, a dirt dessert waited for us by the name of Gauntlet. Possibly one of the most technical singletracks in all of North County, Gauntlet is a short but brutally rocky trail along Escondido Creek that always claims casualties. I've had



Top left: Prickly cholla cacti prowled the riders; wrecked by heatstroke, Dave Callender opted for a 'three-quarter-day debacle'; refueling at mid-day; classic North County trails.





By lunch, some riders already looked bewildered; the author is already devilishly planning next year's ADD.

more than one fall that drew blood while trying to clean the tight, rock-strewn corners of Gauntlet. As the last serious challenge in the ADD, we all took it easy, making sure to clean the Gauntlet in one piece. The final couple miles back to Bykvik's house were purely fueled by visions of pulled pork and IPA.

Because the group covers 65 miles in about 9 hours of total time, the ADD has stayed small by nature. It's an invite-only ride—to get in, you have to have previously ridden with the group or know someone in the group who can vouch for your skills and fitness. Safely shepherding as many as 30 people—some of whom have no clue where they are at times—across so much terrain can be logistically difficult. Ensuring that everyone is fit, capable and skilled enough to keep the rubber side down is paramount. As one newcomer said to me in a moment of pain and suffering while we were pushing our bikes up a steep traverse, “What kind of a ride is this, anyway?” My response was swift and appropriate: “This isn't a ride. It's a debacle.”

The ADD always brings out a bunch of hammers and a healthy contingent of singlespeeders. This year, of the 30 riders, nearly one-third of them rode sans-derailleurs. As impressed as I am with the trail connectivity of North County, I'm even more impressed by the people who turn up to tackle the debacle. Some of the fittest guys I've ever seen north of 50 years old do the ADD without much difficulty. At the ripe young age of 52, Rob Fischer knocked out this year's ADD on a singlespeed, finishing at the very front. This year also marked the ADD's first female finisher, Tami Taylor, who looked as fresh at the finish as she did at the start.

Although Bykvik and I plan to continue rid-

ing the ADD every year, San Diego has reached a pivotal point in its growth. Gone are the days of being able to ride in any direction you want, since rampant development of tract-home hell has decimated open space. Combine this decrease in public land for recreation with the growth in population, and you have more people wanting to recreate on less land, which usually results in trail conflict.

One of the ADD singlespeeders, ‘Ranger Dave,’ is a senior ranger at the San Dieguito River Park, the agency responsible for managing a chunk of open space in the San Dieguito river valley between the beach town of Del Mar and the mountain town of Julian some 55 miles inland. In the last five years, he's seen an explosion in trails usage within his park. On a typical weekend, the trails are loaded with hikers, horses and bikes. It's a great thing to see people out recreating, but part of the reason for this explosive growth is there are fewer places in San Diego to recreate. This reality is ever present on the ADD, especially in the Black Mountain region of San Diego, one of the last bastions of coastal green space, where hundreds of acres of land have recently been bulldozed, graded and marked for development.

Residents and public officials of San Diego County need to stop and think: Do they want San Diego to become another Los Angeles, completely encircled in a concrete jungle, or do they want to preserve the natural beauty of a semi-arid, Mediterranean coastline? As long as the connectivity is there, we'll do the ADD. But looking toward a horizon marked by cranes, bulldozers and power lines, I'm not sure how much longer we have. Worrying about the future is a waste of energy—diall that matters is that we have the trails now, so therefore we ride. All day. 📍



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RYAN PALMER | TEST LOCATION: SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

When Vernon Felton and I flew to Trek's headquarters this past March to check out the brand's secret new bike, all we knew was that it would have plus-size tires. Figuring that 29+ was ridiculous, I assumed that it'd be of the more reasonable 27.5+ variety. Needless to say, I was a bit taken aback when first laying eyes on this update of Trek's popular trail hardtail.

Development began in the spring of 2012 with a project dubbed 'Project Weird.' Trek's mountain bike group wanted to find out how short they could make the chainstays on a 29er, and if it was possible to go too short. By elevating the drive-side chainstay and moving the downtube out of the way, they discovered that 'too short' is definitely possible. The range they settled on for production, however, is still astoundingly stubby: The sliding dropouts are adjustable from 15.9 to 16.5 inches. In the longest position, that's a full inch shorter than the 2015 Stache 29.

Another takeaway from prototyping was that short stays are fun, but the tight rear triangle creates a harsh ride. Larger-volume tires were added to the second prototype, but the bike had clearance issues. Luckily, Trek was already developing Boost 148 rear and 110 front axle spacing that could accommodate larger rubber.

Trek was also fortunate to have Bontrager, which Trek owns, helping out with tires. The Surly Knard led the way as the first production 29+ tire, but it was heavy. Trek knew that this 29+ thing would never take off without a better, lighter tire that riders could accelerate and maneuver easily. So, the Chupacabra was born—a 3-inch-wide tire weighing 860 grams, about the same as a 29x2.3 Maxxis Minion II.

As it was being developed, Project Weird became a magnet for emerging technologies. SRAM's 1x11 drivetrains allowed designers to stick the chainstay where a front derailleur used to go. Then Surly came in with the Knard, leading to the addition of



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Boost spacing, which Trek was already developing to make better 29-inch wheels. Finally, Bontrager refined the 29+ tire, and the Stache 29+ was born.

It isn't just another hardtail—the new Stache is an off-the-wall experiment gone totally...right. Only something called Project Weird could wind up with the largest production tire diameter and shortest chainstays on the same bike. So, how does it ride? Frankly, it's fun as hell. Riding the Stache 29+ brought an instant smile to my face; evoking the same feelings of freedom and elation I had my first summer on a mountain bike.

With the sliding drops set at 16-and-a-quarter inches, the Stache is very lively and maneuverable, which is shocking at first since the wheels rolling beneath you are massive. Minimal effort is required to lift the wheel up and over obstacles—you've got to try one of these things if you're a fan of manualing.

With the 3-inch tires hovering around 13psi, I was easily able to clean steep technical climbs, seated or standing, in a way I've never experienced on a hardtail before, and forget about the cornering. Southern California hasn't seen much rain in four years so the dry trails lack any traction whatsoever, but the Stache grips like the drought is over. The bike descends confidently as well, its tires clinging to and conforming around anything in its path. It maintains speed through chunky rock sections nearly as well as a suspension bike does.

Don't get me wrong, though, the Stache is very much still a hardtail. The big tires soften the trail and increase traction, but they're not a substitute for suspension. You won't hear Trek make that claim either. So what is this new Stache, then? It's the most fun I've ever had on a hardtail.

VERNON FELTON | TEST LOCATION: BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON

The internet is currently aflame with people who are either very impressed by the fact that Trek managed to put the largest wheels possible on a bike with the shortest chainstays possible, or absolutely incensed that this same bike might herald yet more new 'standards.'

In truth, I decided to shelve all the hype and frustration and just ask this question: Is this a good bike? Is it fun?

Yes it is. And I'm surprised to say that. I don't get the whole fat bike thing and the idea of taking a sorta fat bike-ish tire—a 29er

version, no less—and strapping that shit to a hardtail. Well, the mental math doesn't add up to 'rad' or 'awesome' or even, to get all Spock on this joint, 'logical.' Then again, the Stache 9 29+ has a way of defying logic.

You'd imagine, for instance, that getting this bike up to speed would be nightmarish given the portly tires. In truth, it takes a hair more effort than, say, your average 29x2.3, but really just a hair. That's because this bike is wearing Trek's own Bontrager Chupacabra tire, which weighs just 860 grams. If you aren't a gram nerd, that's freakishly light for a tire this big. Will it actually hold up to abuse? Time will tell, but so far, so good.

The low-profile tread blocks on the Chupacabra also keep the tires from feeling like boat anchors. Looking at the minimalist tread, you'd imagine the grip to be horrid, but the tire's footprint is massive and when you have that many tread blocks in the game, they don't need to look like the heavier, aggressive knobs we're accustomed to. You hit the first couple of corners expecting it to drift like crazy, but instead the tire just hooks up. Climbing traction is even better.

The big take away, however, is how nimble and playful this bike is. Trek was able to get the chainstays down to a remarkably stubby 16 inches. I constantly found myself exiting corners on lines that I never even knew existed. On twisty singletrack, the Stache is simply awesome. The bike has that aggressive, low-slung feel, thanks in part to the low, 13-inch bottom bracket and relatively slack 68.4-degree headtube.

Am I an absolute fan of the plus-size tires? It's too early to say, and besides, this is just one bike. With different (i.e., heavier) tires, the Stache would be a pig. I also felt a bit of tire bounce while pedaling flat, fast hardpack fireroads. It's nothing like what you experience on a fat bike, but there is a bit of distracting undamped suspension at play on those kinds of trails. The big tires are very stable and planted, but I personally found them to feel a bit muted, which isn't really my cup of tea. But that's just me.

The cool thing with this Stache is that, thanks to the sliding dropouts, you can also run regular 29er tires or go 27+. If you don't love the big meats, you still have other options. If I were looking for an aggressive hardtail, this bike would have to be on my list. The price, admittedly, is a bit painful. True, the SRAM X1 drivetrain, Shimano XT brakes, KS Lev Integra dropper post and Sunringlé/DT Swiss wheelset are all good kit, but for my money the slightly down-spec'd Stache 7 29+ model is a better value at \$2,520. ▢

TREK'S TWO CENTS | Stache has been the bike that has gotten a lot of Trek staffers off of their personal full-suspension rigs and back onto a hardtail for the first time in a long, long time. It's that fun. We debated if we needed a 27.5+ bike in the Stache lineup just, you know, because everyone else would be doing it. Ultimately, it came back to no, 29+ makes the bike better. We're glad we stuck to our guns on that one. If you disagree with us, pick up the available frameset and make your own Stache 27.5+. Most importantly, just have fun out there.

— John Riley, Trek mountain bike global product manager

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The all-new frame design incorporates other significant changes, too, including fully enclosed internal cable routing and the addition of a fifth size—XXL. With this, each existing size gets a bit shorter in reach than last year's models, so it may be necessary to size up. Specialized has also dropped its Evo series—or more accurately, made Evo the only offering—so all Stumpy 29ers have 135 millimeters of rear wheel travel and 140 up front, and no longer incorporate Specialized's proprietary Brain shock. The headtube angle also slackens a half a degree to 67.5, and the chainstays shorten almost

an inch to 17.1 inches.

The new Stumpy feels very balanced, making it better at everything from slow-speed maneuvers to drifting corners and powering through rock gardens. I immediately noticed the added fun factor gained by chopping the stays—the Stumpy behaves like a sprightlier version of the Enduro 29. A new shock tune developed by Specialized's in-house suspension team delivers unmatched descending control and traction. The FSR suspension is active even while pedaling so bump performance is never interrupted, but this comes at the cost of pedaling efficiency. For anything longer than a quick, punchy climb, I'd flip the switch to Trail mode.

The S-Works model is full-bling, with a carbon rear end and carbon-hooped Roval Traverse SL wheels, but the Expert model is the way to go. It offers the same functionality and you get a SRAM crank that allows a smaller chainring than the Specialized one. Also the aluminum Elite model is worth a look. You'll lose the downtube storage, but will still have one of the most capable trail bikes on the market. —R.P.



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IF YOU WANT THIS BIKE, YOU CAN GO ONLINE AND BUY IT. It'll arrive within a week, and you will have bought a new ride without even having to put your pants on. Commencal is one of a handful of brands choosing to bypass shops and sell bikes direct to consumers—a model that has some retailers up in arms, but for better or worse seems to be working. The Meta AM V4 is the Andorran company's all-mountain bike and sports 150 millimeters of travel out back and 160 millimeters up front. Factor in a 66-degree head angle and the black-and-yellow bike's intentions become pretty clear.

The Meta ascends with a melancholic sort of efficiency: out-of-the-saddle power smashing felt unsupported without the Rockshox Monarch Plus shock in its firmest setting, but the plush rear end proved capable of crawling up some very technical sections—even when I was pedaling in a seated position. Bottom bracket height doesn't appear out of the ordinary on paper, but runs quite low when the bike is weighted. This proved problematic on some chunky sections, and I found myself adapting my line choices to

avoid pedal strikes. Running the shock in the firmer settings helps the bike sit up, but at the cost of traction.

Once back on gravity's good side, the low bottom bracket begins to make a whole lot more sense. I immediately found myself able to compress and drive the rear end through corners, filled with a kind of conviction usually reserved for my best of days. It's no surprise that the 66-degree head angle felt a bit bored on flat sections, but it came alive at speed and wasn't unwieldy when pointed uphill. Commencal has mostly dressed the Meta appropriately; my only nitpick being that the 2.25-inch Maxxis Ardent felt undergunned in the rear. Everything else—including the Commencal-branded cockpit, saddle and wheels—is spot-on.

With the shock tucked away tidily, the toptube and seatstay form a pleasingly continuous line that gives the triple-butt and hydroformed aluminum frame a clean silhouette. If your first love is cruising downhill and crushing corners, the Meta is guaranteed to paint a big fat smile on your mug. Just don't expect much in the way of high-fives when you roll it into your local shop. —Jon Weber



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gt **HELION CARBON PRO | \$5,420**

SOMEONE DIDN'T GET THE MEMO THAT THESE DAYS 'CROSS-country' means torture device. You'll find this bike filed in the XC section of GT's catalog, but the Helion is more interested in having fun than smashing KOMs. It has no problem grabbing segments if that's what you're into, but that's not really its jam. GT markets the Helion as sort of an homage to what cross-country riding used to mean—long, rewarding days in the saddle. Whatever we're calling that now is what the Helion specializes in. Most people call it mountain biking.

Unlike a pure racing machine that ramps up very quickly, the suspension is incredibly supple, soaking up small- and medium-sized impacts with little effort. Toward the end of the travel it becomes very progressive, making the 110 millimeters of travel feel deeper.

This is what makes the Helion ride less harshly than race-oriented XC bikes, but it's still plenty aggressive. Most noticeably, the 69.5-degree head angle gives the Helion very sporty handling, especially on the climbs. Thanks to GT's Angle Optimized Suspension system, the bike will stand up and go when you're putting the power down, even when the suspension is fully open. In

fact, the bike rides better in every condition, with the exception of fire roads, without the pedaling platform engaged. There's a handlebar-mounted lockout lever that acts on the fork and shock simultaneously, but it's not necessary. For a bike that GT markets for cross-country *riding*, not *racing*, I'd prefer to see a dropper post lever in the place of the lockout lever, but that's only one opinion.

GT specs the Helion Pro with a 1x10 drivetrain using Shimano XT and a RaceFace Turbine crank with a 32-tooth ring and an e.thirteen 42-tooth cog (shipped uninstalled) to expand the system's range. Honestly, this single-ring hack is a bit disappointing for a bike at this price. Shifting performance with the expander ring installed is far from ideal—it'd be great to see a true 1x11 drivetrain on this bike. But there are plenty of smartly spec'd parts like the DT 350 Center-lock hubs and Stan's Crest rims, Shimano XT brakes and RaceFace Turbine 35 740-mil-wide bars and matching 80-mil stem.

I love the ride that the Helion delivers. It's quick on its toes like an XC bike should be but forgiving like a trail bike, which inspired me to get anaerobic just for the fun of it. —R.P.

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BAGGIES THAT ARE LONG ON PERFORMANCE, STYLE AND COMFORT



by vernon felton | photo: van swae

ZOIC ETHER PREMIUM | \$120

THE ETHER IS AN EXCELLENT CHOICE on hot rides. While the shell isn't quite as light as what you'd find on, say, TLD's Ruckus, Zoic outfits the Ether with large mesh ventilation panels, which run down the inner thighs and along the waistband. That generous venting isn't immediately obvious, but when you're working up a sweat, you soon realize that they truly bring in some much-needed breeze. That's great in the summer months, but isn't quite so awesome when the mercury drops and the sky is crying.

The Ether features a very nice, detachable chamois and five pockets, one of which, the tech pocket, sports a head-phone cord control grommet and loop. Zoic outfitted the Ether with both Velcro side-adjuster tabs and an elastic waistband. Accordingly, the Ether does a great job of accommodating wandering waistlines, though I'm not as keen on how the elastic waistband actually *feels*. The inseam on the Ether is a bit shorter than average, which is fine if you don't rock kneepads but sort of unsightly if you do.

TLD RUCKUS | \$135

WHEN SUMMER ROLLS AROUND, I invariably reach for TLD's Ruckus shorts due to their light and comfortable feel. The two-way stretch shell is featherlight. While I haven't torn or snagged the Ruckus yet, there are certainly more robust shells on the market. The cut on the Ruckus is damn near perfect. Some shorts feel right when you're faffing about before the ride, but constrictive when you're hunched up on the bike. The Ruckus is the opposite—these shorts are at their best when you're pretzeled up on the saddle.

Troy Lee outfitted the Ruckus with a long inseam (a definite plus if you run pads), three zippered pockets and Velcro'd waist adjusters. At \$135, you'd expect a chamois to be part of the party and, sure enough, the Ruckus also sports a detachable chamois. One nitpick: I'd like to see TLD increase the size of the zippers on the inner thigh vents. The company uses small 'hidden' zippers that are, indeed, unobtrusive, but also a bit annoying to operate when you're wearing gloves.

SHREDLY DSR WOMEN'S MTB LONG | \$100

COLORADO DESIGNER ASHLEY RANKIN debuted Shredly in January 2012, and her shorts have been a savior for female riders ever since. The funky patterns are a refreshing splash of color in a world of drab options and the fit and style are spot-on. I've tested the short and long versions, and prefer the cut with an added 3 inches to the inseam. If you wear kneepads, you'll want the longer length too, which falls just below the knees.

This year, Rankin changed the waist-tightening system from Velcro adjusters to an elastic band sewn into the waist with eight button slots on either side that adjust the fit. I prefer this version because I find that Velcro tends to come undone as I'm moving around on the bike (or maybe I should stop eating so many burritos). Other touches include the Velcro closure with two snaps, two thigh vents and a nice, deep pocket on the right leg. One downside is they're a bit spendy for a shell only—Rankin sells a comfortable chamois separately for \$45—but part of that price is due to Shredly's commitment to U.S. labor; all shorts are sewn in San Diego. —Nicole Formosa



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**DAKINE 8 TRACK | \$95**

MOST OF THE SHORTS IN THIS REVIEW are of the silky, lightweight variety. Dakine's 8 Track shorts, however, aren't playing that game. Think of these things as the industrial-strength Carhartt models of the mountain biking world—the 8 Track's polyester, canvas shell is burly as hell. These things shrug off spills and abuse without flinching. If you're hard on your gear or are looking for shorts that are a bit warmer than the rest, the 8 Tracks, with their bomber build and hefty Durable Water Repellent coating, are the perfect choice.

If you're more of a summertime rider, you might find the 8 Tracks a bit too toasty. Dakine *has* equipped the 8 Tracks with zippered, inner leg vents, but these shorts will never feel as light and airy as shorts constructed from lighter materials. It's all a matter of tradeoffs. As for fit, the 8 Track features both interior Velcro waist adjusters and exterior belt loops, so adjusting the waistline to compensate for last month's pork rind binge is never a problem.

FOX DEMO DH | \$110

FOR SHORTS THAT BILL THEMSELVES AS downhill fare, the Fox Demo DHs feel surprisingly light and airy, but make no mistake—the 600-denier shell is tougher than it looks. Fox makes a big deal about the Demo's 'freedom of movement' and there's truth in advertising here—the shell has a light feel and a nice degree of stretch to it. Sure, you can wear these things at the bike park, but they're just as ideal for all-day pedals in the backcountry. The Demos sport a fairly long inseam (14 inches), so they completely cover kneepads and prevent the dreaded gorbey gap.

When it comes to tweaking the fit, the Demo relies primarily on a front ratcheting closure, which, while very secure, doesn't offer quite as much adjustment as some of the Velcro waist adjusters on other shorts. There are also no belt loops to take up extra slack. Consequently, you need to be a bit more precise with your choice of short size when shopping for these. Lastly, at this price it's a bit odd that the Demos don't come with a chamois.

SPECIALIZED ENDURO PRO | \$130

THE ENDURO PRO IS ANOTHER EXCELLENT choice for spring and summer riding, thanks to its VaporRize shell, which the company claims transfers moisture and prevents your shorts from feeling clammy and claustrophobic. The Enduro Pro also possesses two large, zippered leg vents. The company's DeflectUV 50+ treatment adds a bit of ultra-violet protection to the package—something, honestly, I never look for in shorts, but is a plus for anyone who spends long days under the glare of the sun.

Specialized characterizes its fit as 'relaxed MTB', something that's a given, I suppose, for any baggy short. But that's underselling it a bit. The Enduro Pro has a nice, ergonomic cut that feels natural on the bike. It also features a fairly long (14.5-inch) inseam that makes the short a good choice for anyone who favors kneepads. Waistband adjustability comes courtesy of dual Velcro side adjusters. Finally, Specialized outfits the Enduro Pro with its removable Body Geometry Mountain chamois—a particularly nice bit of padding.

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**MAVIC CROSSMAX | \$130**

MAVIC'S CROSSMAX SHORT STRIKES A nice balance of comfort and durability. The Trail Tech ST shell is as light as those of the more summery shorts, yet feels a hair more substantial than most of the warm-weather offerings. As for storage, the CrossMax sports four pockets on its front face, the bottom two of which snap and zipper close. There's also a small, zippered stash pocket on the backside. Mavic bucks the tide a bit by eschewing Velcro'd side adjusters in favor of belt loops alone. If I had my druthers, I'd opt for having both.

Mavic has created a well-constructed shell that delivers on durability, but is a bit light on the bells and whistles. Maybe that's because Mavic spared a bit of the technical fairy dust for the inside of the shorts, where you'll find the swank Ergo 2D insert—a dual-density, dual-thickness chamois that takes the sting out of the place that often feels the sting on all-day rides.


GRAVITY ANOMALY LONG HAUL | \$85

MADE IN AMERICA? IT'S ALMOST UNheard of today, but that's what's on offer with Gravity Anomaly's Long Haul shorts. The good news is that these things are a heck of a lot more reliable than the stuff Detroit spat out for so many years. The Long Haul is constructed from a four-ply, military-grade nylon shell that gets double-needle stitching throughout and machine bar tacks at all the stress points. Gravity's Anomaly, to its credit, backs up all this durability chatter with a lifetime guarantee.

The Long Haul also features seamless construction in the seat area, which, the company contends, reduces the risk of them hanging up on the nose of your saddle. I'm impressed as hell with what the Anomaly is offering. The fit is excellent—it's easy to adjust the sizing, and with six pockets, the Long Haul offers plenty of room to stash a multi-tool or energy bar or four. While these shorts don't come with a chamois, at this price, you can afford to match them with the plum smugglers of your choice.

RACE FACE TRIGGER | \$80

IF YOU THINK OF RACE FACE AS A company that only makes over-the-top burly kits for Pacific Northwest riders, you might be surprised by the Trigger short, which feels like something Hugh Hefner would shuffle around in while puttering about the Mansion. The Trigger has an incredibly soft and stretchy shell that is absurdly comfortable. It's also quite durable.

But you can't take the North Shore out of a North Shore company. This being a Race Face product, the company has also given the short a heavy dose of waterproofing, which reportedly withstands up to 60 bouts with your washing machine. I've been wearing these shorts quite a bit this winter and water still beads up on the things. These shorts work well in any season. The Trigger is outfitted with five pockets—all of which are secured with either zippers or magnetic tabs—double-reinforced seams throughout, and since it sports both Velcro side adjusters and belt loops, plenty of waistband adjustability. 

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by ryan palmer | photo: van swae

POWER SHIFT: CAN SHIMANO'S XTR DI2 SURVIVE IN A SEA OF SINGLE RINGS? | \$2,575 AS TESTED

WHEN SHIMANO RELEASED ITS FIRST ELECTRONIC ROAD group back in 2009, people had their doubts. My friends and I—all shop mechanics at the time—insisted it was a solution to a problem that definitely didn't exist. The shit-talking was plentiful, but within months of getting Dura-Ace Di2 in the shop, nearly every mechanic was a convert. Adjustment was simple as hell and shift accuracy, reliability and durability of the system was incredible—far better than cabled shifting. Getting a bunch of grumpy grease monkeys behind this stuff was nothing short of amazing.

FAT TIRE ACCEPTANCE

Let's get the obvious out of the way: This stuff is super-expensive. You can get a solid *bike* for the price of just this drivetrain. The thing is, it's not about cost—it never has been with XTR—it's about pushing the envelope of performance. The flagship product is where all the best technologies go first, eventually trickling down to more affordable groups.

Some folks are also concerned about the battery dying on a ride. If it does, that's on you because the battery life is insane. I've been riding it for months and haven't needed to charge it once. I

can't even remember where I put the charging cable.

Mountain bikers have historically been far more accepting of new technologies than roadies. Threadless headsets, thru-axles and disc brakes found their way onto mountain bikes first, so you'd think that when electronic shifting finally hit the mountain bike market, people would accept the idea with open arms. But most of the riders I've asked about it are resistant to XTR Di2, cost aside. Why? Something happened to mountain bikes a couple years ago: SRAM made them work a whole lot better by ditching front shifting altogether. Shimano might argue that SRAM's singlering setup doesn't offer enough gear range, but the marketplace disagrees. Look at nearly any high-end mountain bike today and chances are it has a one-by drivetrain. Di2 is offering the best front shifting of all time at a time when everyone just wants it to go away. You *can* run Di2 as a single ring—Shimano makes a dedicated one-by crank—but you'd miss out on a ton of the technology Di2 has to offer. Plus, you wouldn't get the same range as you do with SRAM.

Hesitation about front derailleurs aside, I was curious about the system, especially the Synchronized Shift feature, which allows the use of one shifter to control both derailleurs.



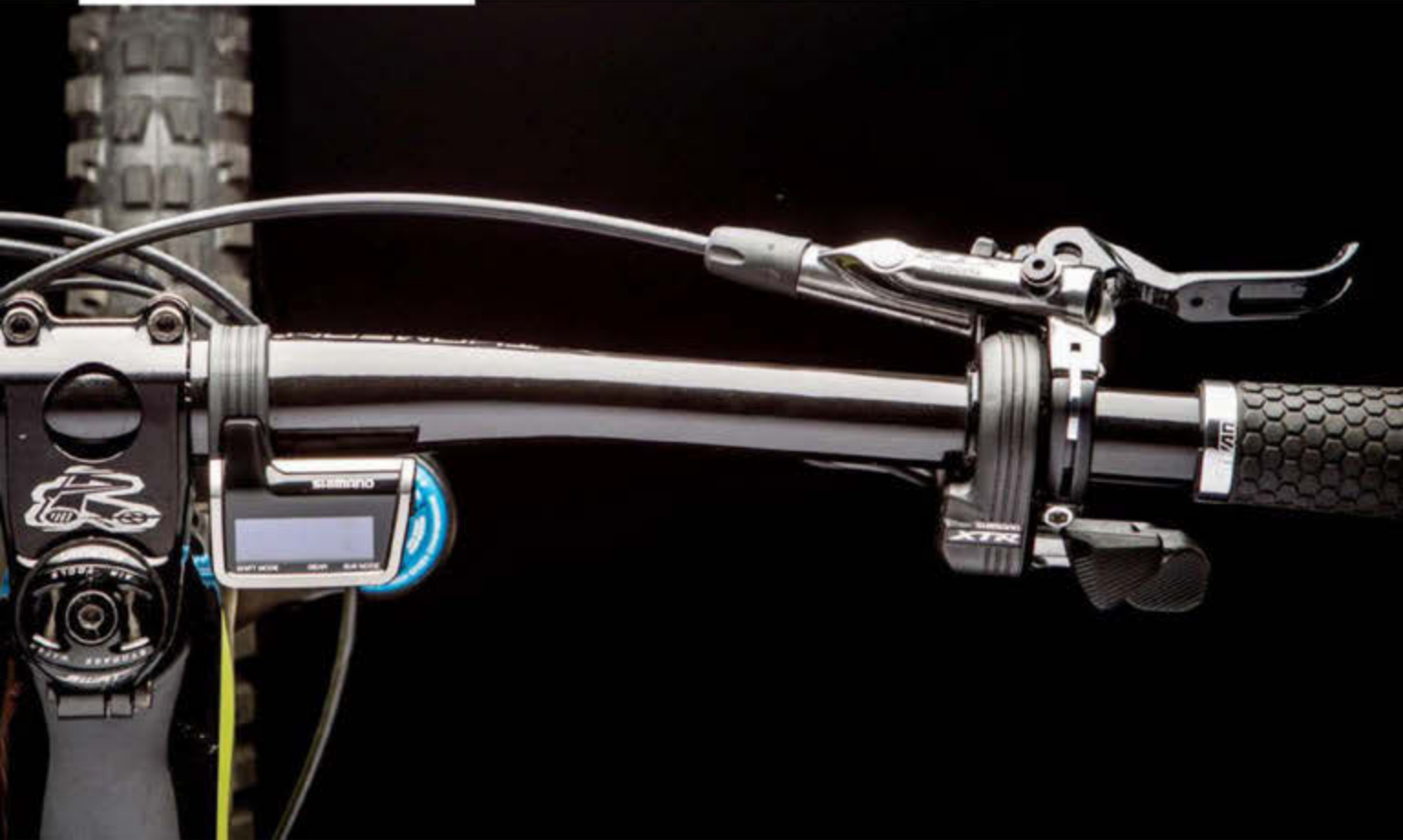
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ONES AND ZEROS

Shimano's E-tube Project software lets you create Syncro shift maps—based on any number of riding styles or conditions—that tell the system at what gear on the cassette you want the front derailleur to shift. The system will hold two Syncro shift modes that you can toggle between using the button on the display. The default Syncro modes will take you from the easiest to the hardest gear without making a very large jump in cadence. You can change that a bit, but it won't let you get stupid, like having five makeup shifts in the back while the front is shifting. The more you ride it, the more ideas you may have to reprogram the shift maps. Or you can always just leave it alone. Unfortunately, the E-tube Project software only runs on a Windows machine, which is just plain outdated.

DI2 IN ACTION

Having experience with road Di2, I wasn't surprised to find the XTR shifting to be excellent, but the Synchronized Shift thing was a new beast. Even though I only had one shifter to worry about, my brain couldn't detach from the idea that I needed to control the front shifting. I found myself lost in the 22 gears after having gotten used to 11. After several rides I started coming around.

In reality, Syncro mode takes you through the entire gear range in just 12 shifts, two more than an 11-speed single ring—the complexity is merely perceived. The front shifting works so seamlessly that the most amazing thing started happening: The front derailleur shifted without me even realizing it. Think about that for a moment—Shimano made front shifting so perfect that it can happen without the rider noticing. Is SRAM more ingenious for getting rid of front

shifting, or is Shimano for taking it out of the thought process? I don't know, but the ride experience is relatively the same: A system that lets you focus on the riding.

The rear derailleur had no problem shrugging off a couple impacts hard enough to scratch it up and bend the hanger. If you were to put the Di2 and mechanical derailleurs in a ring together, the Di2 would win every time. It's far more robust and has less slop than its cabled counterpart. Chain retention is actually quite good, and I feel pretty confident that after a rowdy descent the chain will still be on the ring I left it on. The system can be a bit louder than a single ring, but it's the quietest multi-ring system I've ridden by a long shot. The 26-36 double chainring and 11-40 cassette provided plenty of gear range for all-day rides.

Since there's no mechanical movement necessary, Shimano designers could make the shifters look and feel however they wanted. Thankfully, they chose to make a lever, as opposed to a simple button. The levers have actual throw and an indented click for each shift. The levers themselves are tactile and feel like they're worth the coin, but the plastic-bodied shifter feels less than robust, and the 2-mil hex set-screw has a tough time securing the shifter to the bar.

Regardless, shifting feels the same, no matter the conditions. With mechanical shifting, chain tension can affect how hard it is to push the shifter. With Di2, it's always the same. If you click the lever twice, the derailleur will shift twice, no matter what. Shifting is dead-accurate every time, even if you're powering up a climb. It's absolutely amazing. Your current shifting might be good, but this stuff is on a whole different level. Do you need it? No. But you don't need full-suspension or disc brakes either. 📌



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WTB Scrapper i45 | \$150-\$155
With an internal width of 45 millimeters, the Scrapper is happiest with 2.8- to 3.5-inch tires popped onto its tubeless-ready TCS bead hook. 4D drilling at the spoke holes allows the nipple to interface well with the rim so no eyelet is needed. The Scrapper 27.5-inch weighs 650 grams and the 29-inch version weighs 712 grams. | wtb.com

SPECIALIZED Ambush | \$180
The Ambush is the lightest helmet in its class—a size small weighs 300 grams—and better accommodates glasses and goggles than most of its extended-coverage competition. Cutouts in the foam surrounding the ears allow room for

earpieces, and goggles sit snugly under the visor on climbs thanks to the bill's extensive articulation. The retention system provides even tension, and the Tri-Fix splitters cut down on webbing so there's less material to sweat all over. | specialized.com

BONTRAGER Chupacabra | \$120
For 29+ to feel lively and maneuverable, the tires can't be boat anchors. This whole skinny-fat thing is hinging on the rubber, which is why Trek and Bontrager made the 3-inch-wide Chupacabra before releasing the new 29+ Stache hardtail. Weighing in at just 850 grams, this tire is about the same weight as a 2.3-inch tire with protective cas-


ing. It's tubeless-ready and excels in most conditions. | bontrager.com

THE NEW PRIMAL Pasture Raised Jerky | \$7.59
Fed up with over-processed and chemical- and preservative-laden jerky, The New Primal founder Jason Burke decided to make his own version of the dried meat snack. By using naturally raised, hormone- and antibiotic-free meats and ingredients you can pronounce, Burke has upped the nutrition ante so jerky doesn't have to be truck stop junk food anymore. | thenewprimal.com

DYNAFLEX Powerball | \$40
The Powerball uses the torque created by a gyroscope to provide

resistance to improve grip strength and quicken the healing time of hand and wrist injuries. We know how gimmicky this thing looks, but it works. If you suffer from carpal tunnel syndrome, or have finger, wrist, or shoulder issues, it's worth a try. We'd especially recommend it to pro mechanics. | dynaflexpro.com

ANSWER Stein | \$30
The dimpled surface of Answer's Stein grip mimics that of a beer stein, which makes sense considering that the company's Wisconsin home is rich in German immigration history. Since bike riders and beer go hand-and-hand, it's a perfect fit. The dimples create a secure grip, too. | answerproducts.com



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Hathaway tackles a technical section of the Middle Sam Merrill trail on Mount Lowe, one of the L.A. Basin's signature descents. Mount Lowe drops nearly 5,000 feet over 7 miles.



continued from page 085

pioneer era. Gold was discovered at the lower end of the canyon in 1850s, and although the strike didn't amount to much, what resulted was the construction of trails that are still utilized by hikers and bikers today. The ride begins by motor along the Upper Winter Creek trail en route to Hoegee's Camp, before we eventually descend into Lower Winter Creek. Pedaling out of serene Chantry Flats, we've completely forgotten that downtown L.A. is merely 20 minutes behind us.

"There's a pack station in this area that's been operating since the 1930s," David informs us. "It's the last of its kind in the U.S., and it still services the cabins and camps in the canyon with supplies because they're only accessible by foot or mule."

The undulating, bench-cut loop traverses the hillside clockwise and is often narrow with consequential exposure. Although the ride never becomes uncomfortably steep in either direction, the consistent smattering of rock outcroppings beneath our wheels keeps us spinning the cranks simply to maintain momentum.

In the blink of an eye, the terrain widens, points downward and becomes a playground of roots and rock formations. Descending into canyon, the rocks and water crossings glisten with a rainforest-like sheen thanks to the recent moisture. Before continuing into the canyon, we take a moment to appreciate Jon's array of creative line choices through nature's bike park. After a few more uncharacteristically well-hydrated creek crossings, we roll through one of the final campgrounds, stopping to admire a recently renovated cabin and its still-operating hand-crank

phone. Before we know it, we're beginning our climb out in the direction of where our ride began. As we casually pedal up the road toward the parking lot, there wasn't a single mention of Strava, recovery drinks or wheel-size favoritism—it was purely riding a fun trail in good company—or, as Jon and David call it: mountain biking.

"I am the prototypical Westside L.A. native," says Kevin Waterbury, over coffee at Peet's on Montana Street in Santa Monica. "I was born and raised on the east side of Santa Monica, and today I live on the same paper route I had as a child. My friends and I grew up on the heels of the Dogtown & Z-Boys revolution in the area."

Although as a teen Kevin identified as a skateboarder and break dancer, he took up volleyball to impress a girl who was into the sport. Turns out, that was a pretty good decision.

"For six years in the late 1990s, I played professional beach volleyball," says Waterbury. "It was like living inside a beer commercial 24-hours a day—nothing but beaches and bikini babes. I see these X Games guys now with their amount of celebrity and social media attention, but they have no idea what it was like in the beach volleyball glory days."

Despite spending each day on the most famous beach volleyball court in the world, Kevin always had one curious eye on the Santa Monica Mountains backdrop, wondering about the trails and adventures hidden in the ridges and canyons.

"One day in the fall of 1996, my friend Steve and I decided to ride our fully rigid Rockhoppers from the beach up into the

mountains,” recalls Kevin. “For probably the first 10 rides, we adhered to a strict ignorance-is-bliss policy, meaning we didn’t bring any supplies: no food, no tubes, no tools, nothing. I think I even did the first few rides in flip-flops, straight from the beach. We had a blast. To this day, I still marvel how I can pedal a bike 10 minutes into these mountains and not hear a single car and rarely see a person, while being completely surrounded by one of the biggest cities in the world.”

After competing in the 1996 Olympic Trials, Kevin realized he wouldn’t exactly be able to retire from his volleyball earnings. “I did what every washed-up athlete does in Southern California: I got into the real estate biz.”

The economic meltdown of 2008 had a well-documented catastrophic effect on real estate, especially in Southern California. So Kevin poked around his Rolodex for an opportunity in the industry for which he had the most passion.

“I contacted an old friend who was the sales manager at Knolly Bikes,” says Kevin. “He offered me a job as the SoCal sales rep, which quickly expanded to the Southwest USA territory. After about a year of strong sales in my region, I was offered the position of director of global sales at Knolly Bikes. I finally have my dream job, and it sure was an interesting route getting there.”

TENDING THE GARDEN

Kevin and I began riding together about six years ago, and it didn’t take long for me to realize he was the go-to person for trail information in the Santa Monica Mountains. After just a few rides, I not only knew the history behind my favorite trails, but had also learned about dozens more.

“Humans have inhabited the area for at least a thousand years, which means there are trails on every ridge and canyon,” Kevin explains. “Much of the terrain is a patchwork of different land owners and managers, including Topanga State Park, L.A. Department of Sanitation, The Gas Company and the L.A. Dept of Water and Power. All of these different land managers create a bit of a gray area when it comes to rules and enforcement. I guess what I’m saying is I don’t think we’ll be seeing a Department of Sanitation Ranger patrolling the trails anytime soon.

“I’ve never cut my own trail in the Santa Monicas, but I have been known to give the more fun trails in the area a haircut from time to time. I love doing trail work and have been a member of CORBA

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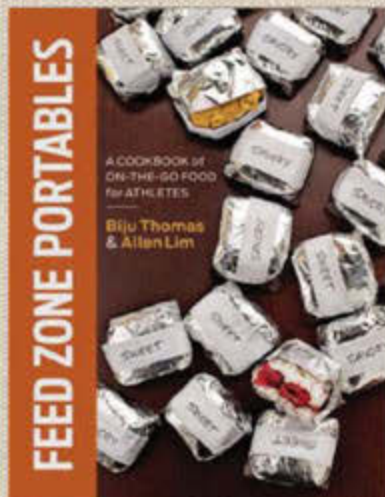


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(Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association) and IMBA (International Mountain Bicycling Association). But, I like the solitude of going up there alone, and sculpting a trail that nobody has ridden in 10 years and bringing it back to life. On average, I do about 30 days of trail work per year."

BACK TO THE BONE

If we didn't have a calendar, we could probably guess the time of year by the quantity of smooth, snake-belly imprints squiggled across the climbs. Yet, on this spring day, riding up from Sunset Boulevard toward the Backbone trail in Will Rogers State Park, we leave the hum of traffic behind us. Although we haven't traveled far as the crow flies from our morning coffee, the only signs of civilization are the cargo ships lined up in the distance outside the Port of L.A.

Like most trails in the Santa Monica Mountains, the Backbone singletrack is tight and twisty and lined with handlebar-hungry scrub brush to keep us on our toes.

"My favorite parts of riding out here are the solitude you feel, and the focus required to stay on your line," says Kevin. "If you don't concentrate, you're off of the trail, upside down in the brush, and wondering if you'll find your sunglasses. No matter how lousy my day has been, once I'm on my bike and on these trails, I have no choice but to focus on my riding. When the ride comes to an end, and I've gotten my dump of adrenaline and endorphins, I always regain perspective on how my day wasn't really that bad after all."

We opted for an out-and-back ride within Will Rogers, with the return route providing views of the city from various ridgelines. As we approach our initial Backbone point of entry, we take the sharp turn down a rutted, swooping, berm-filled roller coaster of a trail that drops us at the foot of the graffiti-covered remnants of Murphy Ranch. "This was a compound run by Nazi sympathizers in the 1930s. As the story goes, the ranch was raided and closed not long after the attack on Pearl Harbor," explains Kevin. "The ruins remain a bizarre piece of LA history, but an even more bizarre place for graffiti—if someone wants their work to be seen."

After admiring some of the newer artwork, we remount and begin our climb out through the glamorous Rustic Canyon neighborhood. We've ridden past these jaw-dropping hillside homes countless times. Yet I can't help but wonder if the residents have any idea of the natural riches nestled in their backyard, or if they're just hoping they don't catch fire. 📷



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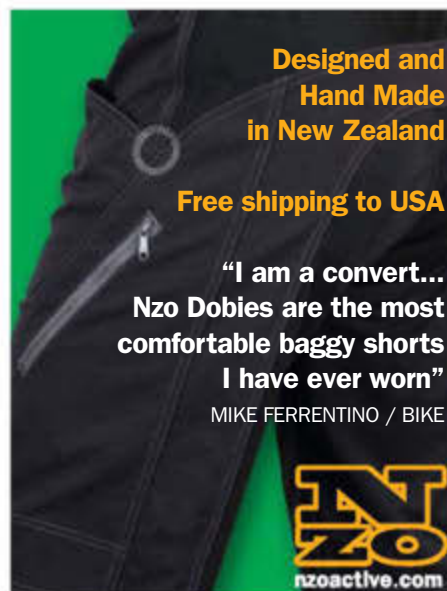


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trade-up time

SOMETHING SPECIAL WAS IN THE AIR AT THIS YEAR'S SEA Otter Classic in Monterey, California. Several dozen people had the chance to participate in a series of product trades that eventually led to the donation of a brand-new Juliana bicycle to an unsuspecting high school mountain bike racer from the National Interscholastic Cycling Association. What started as a characteristically whimsical project by the gents at NSMB.com—who were seeing how far they could trade up from a free pair of SRAM socks—eventually blossomed into a broader industry collaboration as more players became involved. NSMB's Matt Dennison and Dave Tolnai quickly traded the SRAM socks for a couple of Ibis hats, which were then swapped with Race Face for a pair of handlebars. The bar was traded for a pair of Ryders sunglasses, which were exchanged for some Lezyne

tools that were traded up to a pair of carbon Easton bars. Those were swapped for a Sombrio kit, which was duly traded for a set of DT Swiss rims and a hub that were exchanged for a Yakima rack. After the rack was traded for a Fox 36 fork and DOSS dropper post, the NSMB boys approached the *Bike* mag crew with a proposed barter of the fork and dropper for the page of editorial you're reading now, with a view toward convincing Santa Cruz Bicycles to donate a Juliana Nevis hardtail for a story chronicling the entire trajectory. Once Santa Cruz accepted, Vanessa Hauswald, who heads up the NorCal High School Cycling League, chose Hannah Lawrence, a 9th grade student on the Monterey Bay Lightfighters Composite MTB team, as the lucky winner. Hauswald said Hannah's talent, passion and dedication to the team made her the perfect recipient. 📷



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